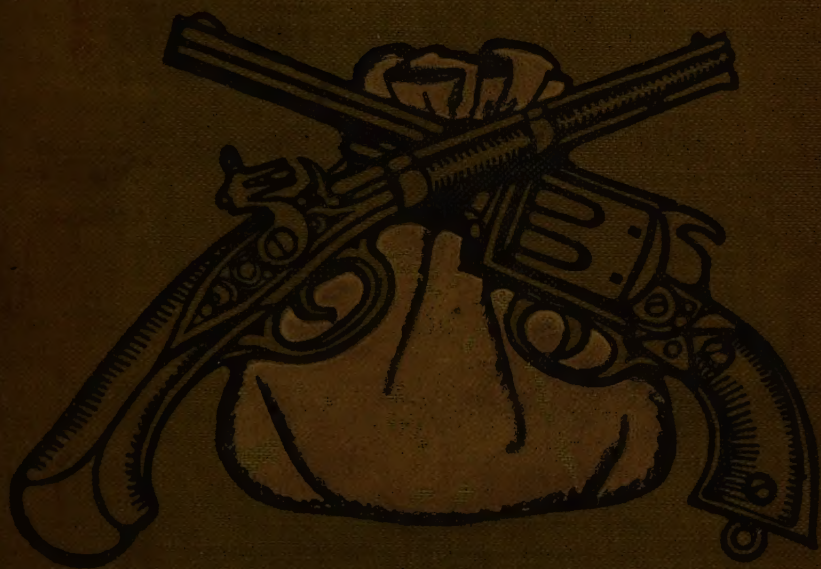


DOUBLOONS



by
E D E N
PHILLPOTTS
&
A R N O L D
B E N N E T T

56

2

Mary Ann Sammas Kosiog

Mary Ann Kosiog
1910

54

72
2
3

to
the

11

11
11
11

DOUBLOONS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS AND ARNOLD BENNETT



NEW YORK
McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.
MCMVI

Copyright. 1906, by
McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.

Copyright, 1906, by Eden Phillpotts and Arnold Bennett.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE WATCHMAN	3
II. THE CORNER HOUSE	13
III. SIXPENCE	22
IV. AN OLD SEA CAPTAIN	33
V. GIRALDA	40
VI. THE VERDICT	58
VII. THE "FLESH-AND-BLOOD"	75
VIII. JOSEPHINE'S THEORY	85
IX. BEGINNING OF PHILIP'S INQUIRY	93
X. END OF VARCOE'S INQUIRY	110
XI. IN THE FOURTH ESTATE	126
XII. THE BANK-NOTES	136
XIII. A DISCOVERY	146
XIV. DACTYLOGRAPHY	155
XV. UNCLE WALTER	163
XVI. FRIENDSHIP	178
XVII. A MOVE OF MRS. UPOTTERY'S	187
XVIII. THE PLATTER	197
XIX. MRS APPLEBY AS MACHIAVELLI	209
XX. TRAVELS IN LONDON	216
XXI. UNCLE WALTER MANAGES BETTER	223
XXII. THE COMPACT	233
XXIII. THE LOG	245
XXIV. A NEW WORLD	252
XXV. APPROACH OF THE ADVENTURE	259

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVI. THE PREY	267
XXVII. THE SILENT VESSEL	277
XXVIII. THE AMBASSADOR	285
XXIX. AUCHENGRAY'S SECOND SIGHT	292
XXX. A STOWAWAY	302
XXXI. DEPARTURE	310
XXXII. AN EXPEDITION	319
XXXIII. THE GRAND ETANG	325
XXXIV. WORLD POLITICS	336
XXXV. WHAT PHILIP WAS TO GAIN	345

DOUBLOONS

I

THE WATCHMAN

THAT monster, London, was just lying down to rest. The clocks of the Strand churches and the Strand hotels, keeping nocturnal vigil, showed a quarter to one under the February moon. Through the windows of closed public-houses could be seen barmen, who, with sleep in their eyes and dusters in their hands, were endeavoring to wipe away the last stain from their counters. The Strand was inhabited chiefly by policemen engaged in the examination of shop doors, and omnibuses that had the air of hurrying home for fear of being late; a Carter Paterson van, obviously out for the night, rumbled along at leisure. In the courtyards of the two great hotels a few hansoms, with their glaring yellow orbs, waited, waited for august patrons, while haughty commissionaires ignored contemptuous cabmen. On the pavements, between Aldwych and Charing Cross, there were perhaps not more than twenty pedestrians, instead of the twenty thousand that jostle one another at noon. The monster seemed to expel a fatigued sigh, as one saying: "I'll try to get a little sleep, but I'm not at all sure that I shall succeed."

Among the score pedestrians was Philip Masters, a young, large-boned man of thirty years, who had already suffered some trifling experience of life, and was destined soon to

DOUBLOONS

endure considerably more. He loitered from the direction of Charing Cross, and, having stopped a moment in front of a jeweler's which was illuminated in order to tantalize burglars, he crossed from the south to the north side at Wellington Street, and then turned up the splendid curve of Aldwych. The vast and ornate architecture of that region rose above him in a pearly whiteness that the breath of the monster had not yet soiled; and Philip wondered, as people in Philip's condition are apt to wonder, where the money came from to rear, with the rapidity of a dream, these blanched palaces devoted solely to luxury and pleasure.

For Philip was at his final sixpence; he carried all that he possessed on earth in a little black bag; and no one was more surprised than Philip to find himself, in the midst of a city that spends twelve thousand pounds a day on cab-fares, with no home and no prospect of adding to the sixpence. Philip once had quite the habit of flinging half-crowns to cab-drivers in the grand manner. He had lost his mother at birth and his father some months earlier, and his effective parents had been a couple of trustees who, on his twenty-first birthday, had furnished him with six thousand pounds and some sound advice. They had brought him up with much common-sense; had been careful to keep him out of public schools, historic universities and other pleasure resorts; had procured him a place in the office of a flourishing publisher; and, in general, had done their best for him. But they had not taught him how to take advice, nor how to acquire a real liking for publishing, nor how not to lose money on the Stock Exchange. So that within six years, besides having shown his heels to

DOUBLOONS

publishing and acted contrary to their advice in almost every particular, Philip had contrived to part with nearly the whole of his six thousand pounds. He was a man of many remarkable qualities; he was even a philosopher of singular enlightenment; but he happened to have been born with a hole in his pocket which nothing could mend.

At twenty-seven he had made away with everything except his peace of mind and his faith in human nature.

He had essayed various vocations, from insurance to the secretaryship of a club, and had not found the right one. He might have succeeded in the colonies, but circumstances had not sent him thither. Not everyone goes to the colonies who might succeed there; Piccadilly is full of colonists who ought to be in Canada. He had stayed longest in his last situation, as half assistant-manager, half professor, in a Jiu-Jitsu School; for he had the frame and the proclivities of an athlete. Among the pupils at the Jiu-Jitsu School (Jermyn Street), had been a duke. In an encounter Philip had locked the duke's arm, and it was the duke's part to yield at peril of a broken limb. The duke, however, possibly on account of his ancient lineage, had not seen fit to yield, and somehow or other the arm had gone off *crack*. Now, when an assistant-manager of a Jiu-Jitsu School fractures the arm of a duke who is making the fortune of the school, the fault is clearly that of the assistant-manager. Philip saw the propriety of a resignation, and he resigned.

That was a fortnight ago. Thenceforward he had sought in vain another profitable outlet for his talents; and though he had as yet neither opened cabs at theater doors, nor sold

DOUBLOONS

evening papers, nor enlisted, nor done any of the approved things for a person in his predicament, he was rapidly acquiring a sort of philosophic desperation. The idea of not having enough to eat, which had at first appealed to his sense of wonder and his sense of humor, now struck him as a merely unpleasant idea.

His thought ran: "It can't be *me* who am 'going under' in London. It surely can't be *me* who will starve or beg." So run the thoughts of all men who reach the end of the tether.

He passed into Kingsway, the immense artery which London's surgeons have created, but through which the blood has not yet learned to flow. Its double line of lamps stretched imposingly to Holborn, flanked on one side by the posters of every theater and medicine in the metropolis, and on the other by the raw remains of habitations which the surgeon's knife had sheared like a guillotine. In the huge and solemn emptiness of the street he hesitated a moment. He wanted to discover a certain new lodging-house of which he had heard, but of whose address he knew nothing save that it was in a street branching westwards out of Kingsway. Less than a quarter of a mile off the brazier of a watchman burned a bright red under the yellow glare of the gas-lights, and a little system of red lanterns, resembling toy railway signals, showed that Kingsway itself, despite its tender age, was already "up." He could see two gesticulating figures vaguely silhouetted against the radiance of the brazier. As he walked slowly on, he demanded of himself whether he would have the courage to ask the watchman as to the lodging-house. His diffidence

DOUBLOONS

about this simple matter was such that, when he approached the brazier, he crossed the road away from it, while trying to make up his mind to accost the watchman.

Here, however, a great surprise awaited Philip Masters.

"Matey!" called out the watchman, who appeared to be alone now, and was somewhat excited.

"Hello!" Philip replied.

"Half a mo'!" cried the watchman.

"Do I *look* like a tramp," was Philip's mental question, "that this fellow orders me to come over to him?"

But he went over. The watchman was middle-aged and rather thin; he wore an overcoat and a sack on top of the overcoat, and two mufflers.

"Want a job?" he inquired of Philip, abruptly, after having scrutinized him. He had been a night-watchman in main thoroughfares for years, and the comparative richness of what remained of Philip's clothes did not deceive him for an instant; he judged a wanderer by his gait and his eyes.

Philip could not tell a lie, so he told the truth.

"Well," said the watchman; "sit in my cabin for three hours, and keep the fire a-going, and the bob's yours, matey."

"Right, oh," Philip agreed, determined to be jovial with the watchman in the watchman's own dialect. "And what are *you* going to do, mate?"

"They've just come for to tell me as my old Dutch is took ill at Brondesbury, and I'm going to foot it up there. I should ha' gone, anyhow, sustibute or no sustibute; but seeing as you'll take it on. — No hankey-pankey, now, matey!"

DOUBLOONS

"Leave me the sack," said Philip. "What have I got to do?"

"Watch!" said the watchman, crossly; then he hurried off.

Philip, his shoulders enveloped in a sack, thus found himself in charge of Kingsway. He had his little house, and his hearth; and he was feeling about the corners of the house with his hands when he chanced on a larder, in the shape of a tea-can and a red handkerchief certainly containing sustenance. But the larder was not his; it formed no part of the bargain; it belonged to an honest and ingenuous mortal in two mufflers, a husband in the midst of domestic calamity. To take it would be to rob a poor man of his bread. Still, in three minutes Philip was eating — all digestive apparatus and no conscience! So true is it that a hungry man, though he won't lie, will steal.

A cab glided swiftly down the street while Philip was warming the tea.

"Don't burn your fingers, Charlie," shouted the cabman, imitating a woman's voice, as he flashed by.

"Take that hoss to the knacker's yard!" retorted Philip, feeling that he must be a watchman to the life or perish in the attempt. As the cabman made no response, he was conscious of pride. He drank the tea. Then a policeman came above the horizon, and Philip thought he would bandy gossip with the policeman. But the aspect of the policeman awed him, and he retired into his little house and pretended to be thinking.

It might have been the sedative influence of half a pork pie, half a loaf, and a pint of tea, or it might have been simply

DOUBLOONS

Philip's fatigue, but he did not keep up for more than thirty seconds the pretense of thought; instead, he went to sleep. And after an interval not to be measured in time, he woke with a guilty start. He had slept while on duty, and deserved to be shot — especially as he had an intuition that in the immediate neighborhood things had been happening which ought not to happen. Also, the fire was low.

He straightened his hat, adjusted the sack, and crept out of his residence to reconnoiter. His residence was at the corner of Strange Street and Kingsway, and a trench had been dug along the south side of Strange Street and nearly a third of the way across Kingsway. This trench was guarded by a rope-and-iron fence, and duly illuminated by lamps in the established manner. It was part of Philip's domain. There was nothing but unoccupied ground to the south of Strange Street, but on the north was a row of tall, eighteenth century houses that had survived many improvement schemes, and would probably survive many more.

Now, as Philip gazed along the trench, he saw a dim form clamber out of it at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards, and shuffle across Strange Street and vanish. But whether it disappeared into a house or into a possible alley, Philip could not decide. Nor could he decide whether the form was that of a big dog, a lion escaped from the Hippodrome, or a human being on all fours.

He gave forth an exclamation.

"What's up?" muttered a deep voice.

He jumped violently. It was a policeman who had been standing behind the cabin.

DOUBLOONS

"I — I thought I saw some one climb out of the trench there," Philip stammered.

"Oh, you did, did you?" said the policeman, approaching the fire.

The tone of the policeman seemed to indicate to Philip that he must control his thoughts better than that.

But Philip was not to be bounced.

"Yes, I did," he insisted.

"It's funny as *I* saw nothing," the policeman remarked with cold irony. "You the watchman?"

"Yes," said Philip.

"Oh, you are, are you?" sneered that agnostic of a policeman. "I'll have a look yonder myself."

And he marched along Strange Street with a majestic tread that would have shaken the Albert Suspension Bridge.

"Nothing here," he shouted, gazing into the trench with noble condescension.

And then he vanished into the distance.

Philip, who had not expected the trench to be full of infantry or anything else sufficiently conspicuous to catch the eye of a policeman, seized a lantern as soon as the constable was out of sight, and jumped into the trench. It was a nice clean rectangular trench, with sewer pipes lying in it irregularly. At the further end, where the sewer had already been laid, the bottom was two feet higher than elsewhere, and at the junction of the two levels the end of the sewer pipe came out from the earth. Lying close by was a broken section of pipe, and, lodged by accident just in the mouth of the laid pipe, was a small fragment of the broken section. Philip

DOUBLOONS

picked it up and examined it. There was clearly stamped on it a single finger-mark printed in some dark substance. He carried it away; it might well be the impress of a workman: it probably was; but, on the other hand, it might not. He saw nothing else of the slightest interest. Before returning to the cabin, he ascertained that an alley named Little Girdlers Alley ran north out of Strange Street nearly opposite the end of the trench. A single light burned in the entrance-hall of the house at the angle of Strange Street and the alley.

“And my breakfast, mister?”

He was thus greeted on his arrival at the cabin. The watchman, his employer, had come back breathless.

“I’ve eaten it,” said Philip. “I’m awfully sorry.”

“Being sorry won’t do,” replied the watchman. “That breakfast’ll cast you a bob, and no less. Here I foot it all the blooming way to Brondesbury expecting my old missus at her last gasp, and she ain’t even ill. Sleeping like a child, she was, and I startled her finely. ‘What’s up, Charlie?’ she says. ‘Why,’ I says, ‘they told me you was dying, Sarah,’ I says. ‘I’ve heard nothink of it,’ she says, blinking out of her silly old eyes. And I thought as she’d got pewmonier at the least!”

“Then it was a false alarm?”

“A plant! Someone trying to make a fool of me! And done it, too, seemingly. Spite! There’s often spite against a watchman. Then I comes back and I finds my ruby breakfast eat up and my tea drunk, and my fire jiggering well nearly out. You can move on, matey, that’s what you can do. And there’s no bob for you in *my* pocket.”

DOUBLOONS

Philip was silenced. He picked up from the cabin his little black bag.

“Can you tell me where there’s a lodging-house called the Corner House?”

“Yes. It’s just there, at the corner of Strange Street and Little Girdlers Alley.”

“Thank you,” said Philip.

A terrific thunder assailed his ear from the south. And in a moment a flying squadron of newspaper vans swept up Kingsway from Fleet Street toward Euston — swept past and was gone. No clatter of hoofs on the hard road, no crackling of whips; nothing but the deafening whirr of heavy wheels and the odor of petrol! The monster had roused itself before the dawn.

II

THE CORNER HOUSE

THE house indicated to Philip by the watchman was like the other houses in the row, except that it possessed a double frontage. It had five stories, a flat, plain face of dark, soiled crimson, and some nineteen windows on Strange Street alone. In common with nearly all similar houses between the Strand and Euston, it seemed to have lost its illusions early in life, and to be awaiting the End with the cold dignity of a proud, unattractive woman. Little had it dreamt, in its Georgian youth, of the unique fate in store for it at the hands of Mr. Hilgay.

The light still burned in the hall, and the moonbeams caught the nineteen somber windows with a peculiar theatrical effect when Philip mounted the steps to the front door. He could now decipher, in discreet letters on a discreet copper plate the following legend:

THE CORNER HOUSE
RESIDENCE AND BOARD
ADRIAN HILGAY, MANAGER

The front door, he perceived, was not quite closed. He pushed it open, and encountered another door, whose upper

DOUBLOONS

part was of ground-glass. On this ground-glass he saw the sharp, moving shadows of two figures engaged in what was evidently a serious struggle; and he could hear the sound of battle and the hard breathing of the combatants. He opened the second door with a rapid movement, and beheld a well-dressed, slightly-built young man in the fatal embrace of an elderly, well-seasoned navvy.

"Help me," spluttered the young man.

"Certainly," said Philip, enchanted by the adventure. He dropped his bag.

With the outer side of his right hand, hardened by special training, Philip gave one cut just under the navvy's ear. Shocked into attention by the novelty and painfulness of the attack, the navvy flung his victim to the floor, and sprang forward to slay Philip, who lay down on the flat of his back between the two doors. If the navvy had enjoyed even the slightest acquaintance with Jiu-Jitsu, he would have recoiled before this master-position in the greatest known art of self-defense. The navvy, however, had never heard of Jiu-Jitsu, and as a consequence of his rash ignorance, after getting a wrist ingeniously sprained, he was propelled in a graceful curve, by the upraised flat of Philip's left foot, clean into the street.

His first thought, on recovering his wits, was that the age of miracles had returned. Then, not being a duke, he staggered away, beaten.

Philip rose.

"Jiu-Jitsu, I suppose?" said the young man, also rising, but with more difficulty.

Philip nodded.

DOUBLOONS

"I thought so. I must learn it. I'm excessively obliged to you."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Philip. "Have you a bed to let? I take it you are the manager."

"You don't know me?" exclaimed the young man, with a gentle surprise.

"No," Philip answered. "How should I? But as you appeared to be trying to chuck someone out I naturally assumed —"

"You don't mean to say you don't recognize me from my portraits?" The young man's surprise was becoming almost a hurt surprise.

"What portraits?"

"Why, in the Press! I've been interviewed, with portrait, by nearly every paper in London. I'm Hilgay. You've heard of Hilgay, the bookmaker?"

"Never!" said Philip, smiling.

"Not heard of Hilgay, the bookmaker, my dear sir! But he was a very great bookmaker, indeed. I regret to have to say it, since he was my father. However, he was strictly honorable. He used to say he had lost a hundred thousand pounds in bad debts to the House of Lords alone. He died and left me extremely wealthy, and as I had the misfortune to disapprove of bookmaking, I was obliged to do something to satisfy my conscience. Hence my scheme, sir."

"What scheme?"

Mr. Hilgay controlled his astonishment at Philip's surpassing ignorance, and then said:

"Come into my office, and I'll tell you about it." He drew

DOUBLOONS

Philip into an office to the left of the hall. It was electrically lighted, furnished with frail, green furniture, and adorned with reproductions of pictures by G. F. Watts.

"Take some cut cavendish?" suggested Hilgay, offering a pouch. "My scheme, sir, is philanthropic. It aims to do for the distressed respectable and well-connected what is done by Lord Rowton and others for the lower classes. I have no prejudice against the lower classes; but their habits are not ours. And it has always struck me that one of the worst hardships of a genteel person (excuse the word) down on his luck, is that he is forced to adopt the habits and endure the society of his social inferiors. Imagine the feelings of a refined individual, sir, whom ill fortune or unwisdom compels to lodge, for example, in a Rowton House! Imagine his natural disgust at the clothes, the manners — especially the table manners — the accent, the — er — atmosphere of those with whom he must associate. I provide a boarding-house (I will not call it a lodging-house) for the respectable person who is reduced to his last sixpence."

"That is my case," Philip put in.

Hilgay bowed, and continued with eagerness. "It is called the Corner House because there is a corner for everybody — of decent appearance and demeanor."

"And who settles what is decent appearance and demeanor?" Philip asked.

"I do, sir. I alone. When I am not satisfied, I say we are full up."

"You are always here, then?"

"This house is my hobby. I am always here. I sleep from

DOUBLOONS

5 A.M. to noon; and from noon till 2 P.M. I take exercise. Between those hours new guests are not admitted. My difficulty with the person whom you so kindly threw out was caused by his refusal to believe my formal statement that we were full up. Such a person would have been impossible in the Corner House, where the standard of manners is high if the purse is low. We eat off marble-topped tables, sir; but we do not eat peas with a knife, and we allow ourselves Japanese serviettes, and we do not make noises, and we do not swear. The ladies leave the dining-room first —”

“There are ladies?”

“Most decidedly. Why not? A distressed gentlewoman, sir, is one of the —”

“And you make it pay at sixpence a night?” asked Philip, filling the roomlet with fumes of cut cavendish.

“It just pays current expenses. Space is rigidly economized, but not ventilation. The old rooms are each divided into two or even three cubicles — but by sound-proof partitions. They are very cheaply furnished, but each differently, and with art furniture; and I could not deprive myself of the pleasure of putting inexpensive copies of masterpieces on every wall in the house.” He waved a hand. “In days when a reminder of Raphael’s *Ansidei Madonna* can be bought for threepence —”

“Exactly,” said Philip. “Now, can I have one of your six-penny rooms?”

“It grieves me to say that we are full up,” replied Hilgay.

“Ah!” said Philip. “I am not respectable enough! I guessed

DOUBLOONS

it! Yet I give you my word of honor that I do not eat peas with a knife."

"I beg you to believe," returned Hilgay seriously, "that we really are full up. the Corner House is a colossal success. However, one of our guests, Mrs." — he consulted a large book open on the desk — "Mrs. Upottery told me last night that she would leave this morning. I will reserve her room for you. And in the meantime you will do me the favor of resting in this arm-chair. I consider myself deeply in your debt."

He jumped up, deprecating Philip's expressions of gratitude. A clock struck five at the same moment, and a step was heard in the hall.

"My sub-manager," said Hilgay, opening the door. "I will give instructions about you. Make yourself at home here. Good-morning, and thanks again."

The bookmaker's son passed suavely, with his rather melancholy smile, out of the little office.

And Philip took the artistic green arm-chair, and slept under the electric light.

He was awakened later by a prodigious din outside in the street. The British workman was commencing his deliberate labors in the trench, and making the world aware of the fact. Philip stretched himself, looked about, and found that the window was open, and also that the pale lustre of a London dawn was competing with the electricity in the room. He rose, turned off the light, and went into the hall.

Two boys were cleaning the floor. They had apparently received their orders, for one of them touched a forelock and directed him to a microscopic wash-basin. Thence he saunter-

DOUBLOONS

ed to the street, where a chill and tonic wind was blowing eastwards. The sane simplicity of the early morning, tranquilizing the feverish pulses of the night hours and dispelling their wild thoughts, made him feel that, despite his misfortunes and his unenviable situation, it was an excellent and goodly thing to be alive.

And then he approached the trench and looked over the ropes. The earth above the laid portion of the pipes had a peculiar appearance on the side nearest to him. It seemed not to lie quietly; it seemed to be somewhat uneven; to have been disturbed and to have been replaced. The group of workmen were moving pipes at the other end of the trench, near Kingsway, their figures vaguely mingled in the uncertain and feeble light. A milkman passed by, one arm weighted by a heavy can and the other stretched horizontally. As Philip stared at the raw and broken earth a regiment of strange suspicions, created out of innumerable half-remembered circumstances of the night, took possession of his brain. A foreman approached him along the trench.

Philip addressed him.

"You notice nothing remarkable about the lie of that soil, there?" he suggested diffidently, pointing.

"A bit rough," replied the foreman, who was munching a piece of bread. "But I don't know as that's any concern o' yours. You ain't his majesty the chairman of the County Council, I presoom?"

Philip broke into his imperturbable smile.

"I was only thinking it had been disturbed in the night," he said.

DOUBLOONS

"Stuff!" said the foreman.

"Going to make them do it again?" Philip asked.

At that instant, his face being in the direction of the street so that he commanded both the trench and the Corner House, he saw in the tail of his eye a blind cautiously lifted and suddenly let fall in one of the windows of Mr. Hilgay's establishment for the respectable.

"Not much," said the foreman. "This is a contract job. What do *you* think?"

"I see," said Philip laconically. The regiment of suspicions fled before the ganger's matter-of-fact tone.

He left the gaping trench and strolled into Kingsway, and then up toward Holborn. He had his next meal to find.

But the foreman, visited in his turn by some disconcerting notion, continued to gaze at the accused earth.

"Bill!" he shouted at length.

An old man in the gang at the other end of the trench glanced up, and the foreman summoned him with a jerk of the head.

"Look at that, Bill," said the foreman.

Bill scratched his head.

"Funny, ain't it?" murmured Bill, in a guttural voice that indicated brandy.

In another minute four laborers had received orders to remove the earth. In another five minutes there was a high commotion. First a boot, then a leg, then the whole body of a man had been brought to view, laid flat against the sewer pipe. The group of laborers stood round it, awed by the pathetic dignity of death.

DOUBLOONS

“Wonder if there’s a p’liceman this side o’ the Thames?” said Bill.

“That was luck, that was!” murmured the foreman, holding in his hand the half-eaten bread. “If it had been any other man but me was bossing this job, he’d ha’ lain there till — goodness knows how long he *would* ha’ lain there!”

III

SIXPENCE

WHEN Philip Masters got into Holborn he turned westwards, as a horse will turn toward the stable, even when the manger is empty. In the West End he had always lived, and he scarcely felt at home east of Mudie's. He had thought of no device for getting a breakfast. It is true that he possessed still the sum of sixpence, but he considered that Mr. Hilgay had a lien upon that sixpence for the promised room, to say nothing of Raphael's *Ansidei Madonna*. Doubtless, having regard to the singular way in which they became acquainted, Mr. Hilgay would offer him the room for nothing, with perhaps a breakfast; Mr. Hilgay had probably given instructions about a breakfast. But, simply because he really needed it, and for no other reason, Philip did not wish to accept Mr. Hilgay's hospitality. Had he been a man of ample means, with a regular income of twenty-five shillings or so tumbling in every week, he would have accepted a meal and a bed from Mr. Hilgay, and looked on it all as a great joke and picnic. Philip was a philosopher, but he was not an unnatural prodigy; and in social matters he was apt to be excessively human.

The curbstone of Holborn was decorated with dust-bins

DOUBLOONS

at irregular intervals, and all the shops, except Pearce and Plenty's, were closed so thoroughly that they looked as if they would never reopen again. A stream of people passed from the east to the west, hurriedly, with a certain gloomy preoccupation. They seemed chilly; the men had their collars turned up and their hands in their pockets, while the women, mostly young, used their feminine pride to keep themselves warm. The Tube Railway threw up quantities of the same sort of people out of the earth. They were the vanguard of the black-coated workers. They all had to be at a particular place at a particular minute; they had the air of trying to catch trains, but they were only trying to avoid fines.

Philip alone had no rendezvous with Capital. He was a loafer; he knew he was a loafer; and the workers knew it, too. They obviously scanned him with superciliousness as part of the submerged tenth, and he could not challenge their eyes with a denial. When one is submerged, one feels it and shows it. But Philip's revenge was nigh.

A magnificent automobile swept down Bloomsbury Street into the main thoroughfare. It was driven by an august being in furs, and its freight was another august being in furs. Philip, who, like many improvident persons, loved and understood motor-cars, at once perceived that it was a four-speed, eight-cylinder Panhard, sixty h.p., with coachwork by Védérine, and that the chauffeur was imprudently running on the fourth speed. He stopped to behold it. There is nothing surprising in a man stopping to gaze at a motor-car; but when a motor-car stops to gaze at a man, there may be fair matter

DOUBLOONS

for stupefaction, and Philip's mild astonishment, as the automobile jerked itself back on its haunches exactly in front of him, may therefore be excused.

The freight leaned its splendid furs over the side of the car; out of the furs smiled a youthful face, with blue eyes and a long fair mustache.

"Phil, isn't it?"

"Hallo, Tony!"

They shook hands.

"What are you doing up so early?" Philip demanded.

"Haven't been to bed yet. Look here, are you busy?"

"No."

"Well, come and breakfast with me, eh?"

"Where?"

"My rooms. The Devonshire Mansion. You're bound to breakfast somewhere."

"I don't know that I was bound to. Still, I accept."

"Go ahead," said Tony to the chauffeur, as Philip embarked. "And shove her along."

"Yes, Sir Anthony."

The car swam arrogantly away. Philip no more formed part of the submerged; in an instant, by the magic of the car and the furs, he had been translated.

"It's three or four years since I lost touch with your stupendous calm," said Tony, after a short silence.

"Five," said Philip. There was a pause, such as frequently occurs between friends after a long separation.

"I notice your talent for small talk is as striking as ever," said Tony.

DOUBLOONS

"Why talk, when others will talk for you? And why does your man address you as Sir Anthony?"

"I'm almost ashamed to tell you, Phil," replied Tony. "But really these accidents will occur even in quite respectable families. I'm a baronet, a twelfth baronet. My cousin died two days before his marriage."

"Never knew you had a cousin."

"That's because you never ask enough questions. So I got the title."

"A pretty toy! Anything useful with it?"

"Fifteen thousand five hundred a year."

Philip paused; the philosopher in him had enough to do to maintain his sang-froid. Five years ago, when Philip was helping to mismanage a proprietary club in St. James's Square, Tony Didring, then aged twenty-two, was beginning a career of cheerful and irresponsible failure as a barrister. The contrast between their characters had helped to draw them together at the club, of which Didring was a member, and for a year or so a club friendship had mightily flourished between these two needy nobodies. And now Tony had a stake in the country and an income of fifty pounds a day, Sundays excluded.

"You're spending it, I suppose?" Philip murmured.

"Oh, quite easily. What are *you* doing?"

"I'm a man of leisure."

"The deuce you are! You don't look it."

"Yes, I do," said Philip. "That's just where you're mistaken."

In no time the car drew up at the Devonshire Mansion on

DOUBLOONS

the confines of Hyde Park. The vast pile, which comprised within its eleven floors a hotel, a restaurant, a café, several clubs, Creistopoulos's cigarette shop, a barber's, a billiard academy, a circulating library, a post and telegraph office, and some scores of flats unsurpassed for elegance, had not yet commenced its brilliant day. The remnant of commissionaires on duty in the great hall, where the three tape-machines are, still wore their mufti of sleeved waistcoats; and the lift-boy, who lifted Sir Anthony and the gentleman of leisure to the fifth floor, had not yet brushed his hair.

An oldish, clean-shaven, iron-gray man received them soberly at Sir Anthony's door.

"Good-morning, Sir Anthony."

"Morning, Oxwich. Breakfast for two. Caviar, kidneys."

"I have ventured to order grape-nuts, Sir Anthony."

"Ridiculous, man! Mr. Masters has not come all the way from Bloomsbury to eat grape-nuts."

"Your digestion, after these nights, sir — or rather, I should say, your indigestion —"

"You're quite right, Oxwich. But this gentleman —"

"I insist on grape-nuts," said Philip.

The portly Oxwich took charge of hats and furs, and presently it was no secret that Sir Anthony wore evening dress.

"You see," he explained apologetically, "we had a bit of a flutter here last night — must enjoy life — and two of my friends, jolly chaps, missed the last train for Manchester. Didn't miss it; forgot it. So I promised 'em they should catch the first. Why, Manchester, of all places, I don't know! But it seems they had an important appointment, I sha'n't change

DOUBLOONS

before breakfast, Oxwich. I'm too hungry. Besides, I'm more comfortable as I am."

"I have ventured to prepare your bath, Sir Anthony, and your new gray lounge suit, with the sapphire necktie. I've had the lower carrying-button of the waistcoat altered."

"Oh, very well, very well! Take Mr. Masters to the other bathroom."

Tony fled.

"Certainly, sir. One moment, sir," said Oxwich to Philip, and picked up the end of a speaking-tube and whistled. "'Nother grape-nuts," he whispered into the tube. "One kidneys *en brochette*."

Then he permitted himself a discreet smile at Philip.

"Not for me," Philip protested.

"Yes, sir, for you," Oxwich insisted. "This way, sir."

Guest and host met again in the latter's dressing-room, and when Philip had seen Tony's thirty-three waistcoats, his eighteen suits, his seven frock-coats, his forty-one sublime examples of fancy trouserings (all in stretchers), his hundred and eighteen cravats, his thirty-three walking sticks and seven umbrellas, his quadruple row of boots, shoes, slippers, and pumps, his thirteen overcoats, his twenty scarf-pins, his four drawers full of shimmering braces, his safe of jewelry his gold-backed brushes, and his unique assortment of hats and caps, he came to the conclusion that, even with an income of fifty pounds a day, it was just as well for a young man who had taken up the expensive and difficult profession of being a dandy to economize from time to time with a grape-nut breakfast.

DOUBLOONS

In the distinguished Chippendale apartment where breakfast was laid, Oxwich assumed control of the proceedings. He put Sir Anthony, resplendent in the sapphire tie, at one end of the table and Philip at the other, and he kept their meals strictly separate.

"Oxwich," said the baronet suddenly, "these grape-nuts are delicious. Will you go to the telephone and retain my usual table in the restaurant for to-night?"

"Now, sir?"

"Now."

"Yes, sir."

"Quick, Phil, my boy!" Tony jumped up as soon as Oxwich had, in his senatorial manner, quitted the apartment.

"Give me one of your kidneys, will you?"

And without waiting for an answer, he robbed his guest of a kidney and began to eat it.

"Afraid of Oxwich?" Philip questioned.

"Only morally," said Tony. "His empire over me is purely moral, I assure you. And he's quite right about my digestion."

"How did you get hold of him?"

"I didn't. He got hold of me. He was my cousin's valet, and he seemed somehow to go with the estate."

"I like him," said Philip.

"So do I. He resembles grape-nuts — he's good for me. And his taste in neckties — amazing!"

Tony gulped down the last of the stolen kidney as Oxwich senatorially returned.

"Done it!" said he, sinking back into his chair.

"Yes, sir!" Oxwich murmured; "it is arranged."

DOUBLOONS

"I don't mean what you mean," said Tony blithely.

"A little more grapè-nuts, sir?"

"No, thanks — excellent as they are! If you've finished, Phil, let's go into my study, eh? Oxwich, the cigarettes."

"Your study?" Philip repeated, surprised, knowing Sir Anthony's indifference to literature.

"Well, my den, my whatever you like to call it. I'll show you something."

Followed by Oxwich bearing various brands of cigarettes, they crossed the passage to a Sheraton apartment, larger and richer than the other. In the middle of the room, next to a grand piano on which lay the vocal score of "The Spring Chicken," was a peculiar oblong table, the top of which was painted to represent a pack of cards laid out in four rows according to suits; all round the pack was a wide border of green cloth, and at one end was marked a circle with the mystic word "joker" in the center of it.

"What's this?" Philip demanded.

"This is *it*," was Sir Anthony's reply, and his face brightened. "This is what I wanted to show you. The latest machine for having a flutter. It's just out, and it'll be all over the Riviera next season. It's called card roulette. It's better than roulette — no ball-spinning, no noise. You simply shuffle and cut a pack of cards, and put your money on either a particular card, or a suit, or a number, or a color."

"And instead of zero, you have a joker in the pack, eh?" asked Philip.

"You've tumbled to it, my son. Pack of fifty-three cards. We were playing till five o'clock this morning. I never tire of it."

DOUBLOONS

"Did you win or lose?"

"I won. I was banker. How much did I win, Oxwich?"

"When I retired to rest the bank was two hundred and eighty pounds in hand, Sir Anthony," said Oxwich, striking a match and holding it for Philip.

"I could enjoy this game, I fancy," Philip remarked. "It's Monte Carlo in the home."

"Yes, isn't it?" Tony agreed enthusiastically. "Why not have a flutter now?"

"All right."

"It's a fifty-one to one chance against any card, you see. Three to one against any suit, and twelve to one against any number. Will you bank, or shall I?"

"Oh, you'd better bank," said Philip.

"Right. Oxwich shall shuffle and cut, eh? Oxwich, the cards."

Philip drew sixpence from his pocket, and put it on the queen of spades.

"You're getting cautious in your old age," Sir Anthony commented, emptying his pockets on to a corner of the table. "Now, Oxwich."

Oxwich majestically shuffled, and cut the queen of spades.

"Good for you," said the baronet. "Better than bridge, isn't it? Oxwich, — fifty-one times sixpence?"

"One pound five and six, sir."

"Leave all the money on the queen of spades," said Philip. "I'll try her again."

"We have a limit of a couple of quid on the big chance," Sir Anthony explained. "Now, Oxwich."

DOUBLOONS

Oxwich shuffled and once more cut the queen of spades.

"The devil!" muttered Sir Anthony.

"Oxwich, fifty-one times one pound five and six?"

"Sixty-four pounds and sixpence, sir."

"Excuse me, sixty-five pounds and sixpence," said Philip.

"My fault entirely, sir," said Oxwich. "I should have said sixty-five."

"Don't mention it," Philip smiled. "What's your maximum stake on the suits?"

"Twenty quid," said Sir Anthony, taking notes from a breast pocket.

"I'll go maximum on spades," Philip announced.

And Oxwich cut spades.

Philip counted his winnings — a hundred and twenty-six pounds six shillings, plus the original sixpence.

"What are you going to do next?" Sir Anthony inquired.

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I'm not going to do anything next," Philip responded.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you some other time," said Philip, in a strange voice.

The baronet looked at Oxwich, who faded from the study.

"What's up, old chap?" Sir Anthony asked.

"Nothing! Look here, I'll give you your revenge. I'll toss you double or quits."

"Done!" snapped the baronet, picking up a coin. "Sudden death!"

"Tails," said Philip.

It was.

DOUBLOONS

Philip sat down.

"I'm not quite well," said he.

"You ought to be," said the baronet, parting with more notes.

"The fact is —" Philip began, hesitated, and proceeded: "You remember I put sixpence down to start with?"

"You did."

"It was my last in the world. I was starving when you picked me up this morning. Now I'm worth an immense fortune — two hundred and fifty pounds! I've never gambled before in my life, and I shall never gamble again, T ny. On that you may stake your bottom dollar."

"Well, I'm dashed!" breathed the baronet softly.

IV

AN OLD SEA CAPTAIN

THEY dined together that evening at Sir Anthony's usual table in the Louis Quatorze Restaurant on the first floor of the Devonshire Mansion. It was the table between the second and third onyx pillars on the left as you enter by the grand entrance—not the entrance from the suite of the Half Moon Club. They had spent a curious but interesting day. It had rained most of the time. After Philip, in his laconic way, had finished reciting his *Odyssey* to the young baronet, he had announced his intention of going out to get three suits of clothes; three suits and no more—a lounge suit, a frock-coat with the latest in trouserings and waistcoats, and a dress suit. Philip meant to be economical, strictly so; but with two hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket he could not deny himself the satisfaction of replacing the dress suit which he had abandoned a few days before to a pawnbroker in Gray's Inn Road. Sir Anthony had replied that, having regard to the weather, it was absurd to go out, and that the mountain, summoned by telephone, would certainly come to Mahomet. The mountain did come; in fact, several mountains came, including a Mont Blanc of a tailor, and a respectable Ben Nevis of a hosier. Nor was that the only miracle. By the intervention of

DOUBLOONS

Oxwich and the baronet, Philip had his dress suit within eight hours!

After lunch they had both, with one accord, fallen asleep, and slept for two hours.

Then there had been tea, cucumber sandwiches, trying-on, and a visit to an acquaintance of Sir Anthony's, who had a flat in the mansion — Miss Kitty Sartorius, the renowned star of the Regency Theater. It was Kitty's "day," and half the genius and all the golden youth of London were there.

And then Philip had refused to dine with Sir Anthony, but had consented to remain and dine in the restaurant if Sir Anthony would be his guest. Philip had explained that all the hospitality could not be on one side. Moreover, had he not relieved Sir Anthony of five days' income? And lastly, though he meant to be strictly economical, he did not intend that the era of economy should set in with full severity until the morrow.

"Look here," said Tony suddenly, during the *timbale de macaroni*, "we'll go for a run in the car to-morrow if it's fine."

"No," answered Philip firmly. "To-night I sleep at my Corner House in the corner reserved for me by Mr. Hilgay. To-morrow I begin to look for my living."

"Suppose you don't find it? Not so easy, you know. You've been trying some time."

"Ah!" said Philip. "But then I hadn't got three good suits of clothes, and money enough to keep me for a year. That frock-coat I've ordered will get me a situation pretty nearly anywhere."

DOUBLOONS

"Then you abandon me to my fate?"

"What fate?"

"Why! I haven't got a friend in the world, except you. I'm not in love. I'm not even in debt. I'm only bored." Sir Anthony sighed. "You don't fancy I'm happy, do you?"

"Not in love! You always used to be."

"The fact is," said the baronet self-consciously, "I've had a serious reverse in that — er — that department. It's blighted my life, my boy. I shall never be the same man again."

"No, I know you won't," Philip smiled, "not until next time. Tell me about it. You've told me nothing really exciting yet about yourself."

The tableau of the gay and irresponsible Tony ruined for eternity by a hopeless passion amused Philip.

"It was a —"

"Well, go on."

"No; I won't talk about it. I can't. I'll only tell you that I had a stall seventy-three nights running to see her. What do you think of that?"

"Sublime!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh — Ha! Mr. Varcoe! You here! Come and have coffee, will you?"

Sir Anthony turned quickly to a little, dark, spectacled man, who was passing the table.

Mr. Varcoe stopped and bent the gaze of his spectacles on the baronet.

"A charming idea!" said Mr. Varcoe. "With pleasure. I'll be with you in an instant."

DOUBLOONS

"And who is Mr. Varcoe?" Philip demanded, while the latter was away.

"Dashed if I know. Met him at Kitty's this afternoon. Didn't you see him? Seemed a very decent, agreeable, jolly sort of chap. Awful keen on swimming. Swims all through the year, he says, as I do. Challenged me to a race in the Serpentine on Christmas morning, but I wasn't having any. I should think he must be one of the cracks. Doesn't talk about anything else, you know."

"I suppose that's why you invited him to my dinner-party," Philip observed.

"Awfully sorry, old man; I was thinking for the moment it was my party."

However, when Mr. Varcoe returned and had been introduced to Philip, he mentioned no word of swimming. He held in his hand a copy of the special edition of the *Westminster Gazette*, and for a few seconds its contents seemed to preoccupy him to such an extent as to make him nervous.

"Anything in the paper?" Philip inquired nonchalantly.

Mr. Varcoe stared hard at Philip, fixing him with those spectacles.

"Yes," said he; "the murder of that old sea captain."

"What old sea captain?" Philip asked.

Mr. Varcoe glanced around the glittering room, which was now chiefly occupied by waiters. The little trio of two young, fair Anglo-Saxons, one dandiacal, and the dark man who might have been any age and of any nationality, was isolated in a sea of empty white tables.

"Captain Pollexfen," said Mr. Varcoe in a low, calm voice.

DOULBOONS

He appeared to wait for the effect of his words. They had no effect.

"And who was Captain Pollexfen?" Sir Anthony idly demanded, opening his cigar-case.

"He was just a sea captain. That is almost all that's known."

"Where was he murdered? How was he murdered?"

"Back of his head smashed in."

"But where?"

"It isn't ascertained."

"But I suppose they've found the corpse?" said the baronet, as he set fire to a Bock.

"Yes," replied Mr. Varcoe, still in the same low voice. "It was found this morning buried next to a sewer in an open trench near Kingsway."

Philip's heart gave a jump, and the ash of his cigarette fell.

"Nice sort of a cemetery!" Tony commented before Philip could put a word in. "Any clue?"

"One. There was a scheme to get rid of the regular watchman at the trench last night, and his place was taken by a young man," said Mr. Varcoe, looking Philip steadily in the face. "The murder was committed while the young man was in charge. The young man behaved very strangely to a policeman who happened to come up just afterwards. He then tried to get a bed at a lodging-house exactly opposite to where the corpse was buried, and though he didn't succeed, he ingratiated himself with the manager of the lodging-house. Old Pollexfen had been staying in the house. This morning, after the gang of laborers had recommenced work on

DOUBLOONS

the trench, the young man was found hovering near the spot, and he actually suggested to the foreman that the soil had been disturbed. He then fled."

"Sort of fatal fascination that the corpse has for its murderer, eh?" said the baronet.

"Perhaps," Mr. Varcoe admitted.

Philip half stood up, then sank back.

"You're a detective, Mr. Varcoe!" he blurted out.

And Mr. Varcoe calmly said:

"I am."

"A detective!" exclaimed Sir Anthony, shocked.

"And I've been keeping an eye on you both ever since ten o'clock this morning," added Mr. Varcoe.

A state of high tension existed at the table.

"You want me to go with you?" said Philip, motioning Tony to be silent. "You suspect me? Appearances are against me, is that it?"

"Appearances might have been against you, my dear sir," said Mr. Varcoe, "if you had displayed the least agitation when I first mentioned a sea captain and the name of Pollexfen. But you did not. Thus my previous notion that you are not immediately connected with the murder is, to a certain extent, confirmed. Appearances, then, are not against you. On the other hand, they are not for you. And though I do not wish you to 'go with me,' I shall esteem it a favor if you will keep me informed of your address. At any rate, your evidence will be valuable. I would like your version."

"At once?"

DOUBLOONS

"Why not?" said Mr. Varcoe, sipping his coffee. "If Sir Anthony does not object."

"Better come up to my rooms," Sir Anthony suggested; he was perplexed and unnerved by these revelations, for Philip had not mentioned to him the trench episode.

And up there, in the den, after Philip had related everything he knew to the detective, a rather strange piece of conversation ensued.

"What about Pollexfen's relatives?" Tony asked. "Hadn't he any?"

Mr. Varcoe seemed to pierce into Tony's soul with a swift glance.

"Do you know," said he, "I was expecting that question from you."

"Why from me?"

"Because you are Sir Anthony Didring, that's all. Yes, Captain Pollexfen had relatives — a brother and a daughter. And the highly curious thing is that they have both disappeared."

"Since the murder?"

"No. Several days ago."

V

GIRALDA

IN a large chamber of irregular shape, with glass peep-holes in strange positions, a chamber that looked as if it had been originally designed by a child out of a box of bricks and subsequently enlarged by a pavement artist under the influence of wine, a chamber all whitewash and cement and concrete, and full of a strange odor, a shabby, self-conscious crowd of some twenty men and three women were wandering lumpishly about from peep-hole to peep-hole, spying, crying, grinning, whispering, nudging. And a universal instinct made them tread as softly as they could on the hard floor. Through one peep-hole was to be seen the corpse of a young child that had been overlaid by its parents, through a second the corpse of another young child that had been overlaid by its parents; through a third the corpse of a middle-aged nun who had hung herself by means of a window-cord in a Marist Convent not far from Lincoln's Inn; and through a fourth the corpse of an old sea captain of whom little was known except that his name was Pollexfen and someone had buried him in a sewer. This was the mortuary of a central London district. The audience whom the law had invited to the spectacle consisted of sundry witnesses, whose consciences were more or less easy, and a jury of small

DOUBLOONS

tradesmen and employees wrenched from their work, whose feelings were divided between annoyance, self-importance, and curiosity.

The four corpses, waste product of one day's history in a single quarter of London, defied the scene and the crowd to rob them of their icy and majestic dignity. They reposed there in those compartments, with the indestructible proud calm, at once impressive and pathetic, that death alone can give.

Presently an aged nun and a well-dressed man entered with a policeman; and the crowd gaped. The nun was the Mother Superior of the Marist Convent, and the man was Philip Masters. The Reverend Mother gave one glance through the peep-hole at the dead nun, pressed her thin lips tightly together, clasped her cross, and went out on the instant. The policeman directed Philip to the peep-hole of Pollexfen, and Philip beheld a typical sailor's face, an old, wrinkled, reddish face, with a reddish-gray beard that curved outwards from under the chin, and a long, smooth upper lip; the hair was awry. The hands were gnarled and pale. It seemed impossible that Captain Pollexfen was dead; he had the look of having dropped off to sleep for a few moments in his bunk. It seemed impossible that those simple eyes had but recently glimpsed murder in the eyes of another, and that that existence had survived the seas of half a century in order to end in a sewer and furnish copy for evening papers. It seemed horrible; it seemed uncanny; it seemed unreal. Philip shivered in his spirit as he thought of himself asleep in the watcher's cabin, while within a few yards of him quick and ruthless hands

DOUBLOONS

had packed the unresisting limbs of the old sailor close to a common drain-pipe in a common open street.

The policeman touched his shoulder. The mortuary had emptied; the private view was over; and the inquiry was to begin. It was already half-past two in the afternoon. In the wake of the policeman Philip crossed the street to the coroner's court, a nondescript room that might have been a *crèche*, a soup-kitchen, a workshop, a school — anything but a temple of justice. He had to show his subpœna at the door, and he was told curtly to sit on a certain bench. Near him he noticed a negro. The room was pretty full. An official was taking the names of the jury who, important and timid, sat in two rows on the side of the court opposite to the witnesses. At the back were a handful of persons who, being out of a job, were representing the great and enlightened British public. Two policemen, who struck the eye unfamiliarly because they were without their helmets, dominated the scene.

Then there was a movement; everybody rose; and the coroner, the celebrated Mr. Acrefair, known by name to all newspaper readers, entered. He was a thin, active man of forty-five or so, dressed like a stock-broker, and he carried a brown bag. In a fraction of time he had doffed his overcoat, ransacked his bag, and assumed his seat at the knee-hole desk which served as the judicial stall. And almost before Philip could realize the fact, the inquest on one of the overlaid children had begun.

Mr. Acrefair did nothing but hold inquests. He passed his days in an atmosphere of sudden, violent, and mysterious death. He was impassable, disillusioned, undeceivable;

DOUBLOONS

and his methods were very rapid because he invariably had rather more work than he could do. In an hour and a quarter he had dealt with the two infants and the nun; censured the parents of one child, had a passage of arms with the Mother Superior, gently ridiculed a priest, examined altogether seventeen witnesses, summed up three times to the jury, and given effect to three verdicts. His celerity, his ingenious economy of time, his skill in getting evidence, his placid and yet remorseless determination to have the unexaggerated and unminimized truth, his just estimate of human nature, his habit of absolute authority — these qualities astounded and delighted Philip, who thought how interesting it would be to catch that man one night in a quiet corner of his club and through a haze of cigar smoke listen to such philosophy as life had taught him.

And then Mr. Acrefair, after having signed some papers hurriedly, looked up at the jury, and said in a new tone of voice:

“The next case is somewhat remarkable, gentlemen, and will demand your special attention.”

He apparently knew all about it.

The first witness was the constable who had been called to assist at the unearthing of the body. He gave his evidence as he might have poured tea out of a pot, smoothly, without pausing and without being questioned. He had merely watched the latter part of the process of exhumation. The corpse was lying parallel to the drain-pipe, close to it and with the face toward it. He had afterwards superintended the removal to the mortuary. He had been summoned at 7.15 on Tuesday

DOUBLOONS

morning. Having stated these facts, he shut his little notebook.

"You searched the body?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing whatever, sir."

The coroner wrote, and gazed absently at a chromograph of the Prince of Wales which ornamented the wall in front of him.

Then came a doctor, a portly and pompous man, in a blue Melton overcoat. He had a long gray beard and a big, white nose; his beard was in some sort an ideal that he had to live up to.

"You have made a post-mortem examination of the body of the man described by the last witness?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"What was the cause of death?"

"Concussion and compression of the brain, caused by a violent blow at the base of the skull."

"Compression of the brain?" asked the foreman of the jury, seemingly resolved at all costs to protect the jury from mystification. He had a long gray beard, and a kind of rivalry was established. "Will the gentleman kindly tell us what *compression* of the brain is?"

"In the pathological sense?"

"In sense."

"Compression of the brain occurs whenever its structure is so squeezed that its functions are in any degree interfered with."

DOUBLOONS

"Thank you," said the foreman.

"There were punctiform hemorrhages," continued the doctor, taking his revenge, "in the pons varolii and in the floor of the fourth ventricle. The whole surface of the brain was intensely congested. There was no external lesion; merely a very slight abrasion of the epidermis over a circular area of about five square inches."

"Not five inches square?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir, five square inches."

"Was death instantaneous?"

"It is impossible to say."

"Was the man dead before he was buried?"

"Yes."

"At what time do you estimate he died?"

"I began the necropsy at four o'clock yesterday afternoon. I judge that he had then been dead about sixteen hours. That would make it that he died on Tuesday at midnight."

"The blow might have been delivered much earlier than that?"

"Not much earlier. Perhaps an hour at most."

"With what kind of an instrument do you suppose the blow was delivered?"

"Something soft and heavy. Probably a bag of wet sand."

"The injury could not have been caused by a fall?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"It would have needed a fall of thirty or forty feet, and such a fall would have broken half the bones in the body."

DOUBLOONS

"Was the body well nourished?"

"Fairly well."

"What did it weigh?"

"I did not weigh it."

"At a guess?"

"Perhaps eleven stone."

"Have you any questions?" the coroner demanded of the foreman of the jury.

"No, sir."

The coroner finished writing, and resumed his stare at the portrait of the Prince of Wales.

"Mr. Adrian Hilgay, who followed the doctor, was the first of the witnesses who wept. The respectability of the Corner House had been shaken to its very basis by the murder. The coroner eyed him sharply.

"Your lodging-house is a philanthropic undertaking, Mr. Hilgay?" he asked, after the preliminary questions.

"My boarding-house —"

"You need not trouble to correct my phraseology," interrupted the coroner. "I said lodging-house."

Mr. Hilgay flushed. "It pays its way."

"What do you charge?"

"Sixpence or a shilling a night."

"And that pays? Rent? Interest on capital? Managerial expenses? Deterioration?"

"There is no rent. I am the manager. I accept no salary. I make a present of my capital to the concern. I haven't had time yet to think of deterioration."

DOUBLOONS

"When you say it pays its way, then, you mean that it pays for cleaning and service, and that the meals are not served at an actual loss?"

"Yes."

"You are new to philanthropy?"

"We must all begin," said Mr. Hilgay

"Just so," said the coroner. "You think you are alleviating the poverty of London by your venture?"

"Certainly."

"Ah! What is your age, Mr. Hilgay?"

"I do not see —"

"How old are you, sir?"

"Twenty-six."

"You have identified the body of the deceased?"

"Yes; it is the body of Captain Pollexfen, who took a room in my house about ten days ago."

"The exact date?"

"The 10th instant, I am nearly sure."

"What was his Christian name?"

"I do not know."

"Of what ship was he captain?"

"I do not know."

"He had retired from service?"

"I believe so."

"What were his habits?"

"For a week past he had been unwell, and stayed in his room, except occasionally for meals."

"Did he strike you as being poor, in reduced circumstances?"

DOUBLOONS

"I imagined him to be, like most of my boarders, hard put to it, but respectable."

"He did not talk much?"

"No."

"Never chatted with you?"

"Never, except about the weather. He would usually mention the precise direction of the wind."

"At meals did he join in the conversation?"

"Very little."

"And he had no friends, no acquaintances?"

"There was a negro, named Coco, who came to see him sometimes."

"In his room?"

"Yes."

"Do you know if he had just come from a voyage?"

"I do not."

"When did you last see him?"

"On Tuesday evening, about eight o'clock."

It was at this point that Mr. Hilgay wept.

"Where?"

"He came into the house and went up-stairs. His room was on the first floor."

"You said he had not been out for a week."

"That was the first day he had been out. He went out twice. Once in the afternoon, and again in the evening."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw him come in each time."

"Where were you?"

"In my office, to the left of the hall. The door of my office

DOUBLOONS

is of glass, and from my desk I can see everyone who comes in or goes out."

"How long did he remain out the second time?"

"About half an hour."

"You saw him leave?"

"Yes. I went into my office after dinner, about seven, and I was either in my office or the hall continuously till four o'clock the next morning, Wednesday."

"Did you receive any new lodgers that day?"

"No. The house was full."

"And your old lodgers behaved as usual?"

"Absolutely."

"How many went out after Captain Pollexfen came in at eight o'clock?"

"None."

"Now mind what you are saying, Mr. Hilgay. You have told us that no one could leave your house without your knowledge, and that you saw no one leave it after the Captain came in. Here he is in the house, presumably in his room, at eight o'clock at night, and yet early the next morning his body is found in the sewer trench. How do you account for that?"

"I cannot account for it."

"Either he was murdered in your house —"

"Impossible, sir! Impossible!" protested Mr. Hilgay.

"Nothing is impossible, sir," said the coroner. "Either he was murdered in your house and his body carried out, or he left your house alive and was murdered outside. You think no one could have crept past your office door unseen by you?"

DOUBLOONS

"I think not."

"Where are the stairs?"

"They begin just at my office door, and are in a line with the hall."

"There are no other stairs in the house?"

"There are the *backstairs*," said Mr. Hilgay. "Used exclusively by the household staff."

"Ah! There are the backstairs. What is the household staff?"

"Five boys and two female cooks."

"Where do the backstairs lead to?"

"The back of the house. The kitchen. There is a back yard."

"Any door to the back yard?"

Here one of the policemen, with an air of apology to the coroner, lighted the gas, after having struck two matches.

"Yes," Mr. Hilgay answered, blinking in the new glare. "It gives on Little Girdlers Alley. It is bolted at night."

"What time?"

"After dinner — about seven o'clock."

"Bolted on the inside?"

"Yes."

"So that anyone could open it from the inside?"

"Yes."

"Could a person go down the backstairs and get out without going through the kitchen?"

"Yes."

"What time are the lights turned out in the back of the house?"

DOUBLOONS

"About eleven o'clock."

"Little Girdlers Alley runs into Strange Street at right angles, and your house is at the corner?"

"Yes."

"Where was the Captain's room situated?"

"The window looks on the alley."

"Who occupied the room next to it?"

"A widow lady named Upottery."

"She is here?"

"She is ill in bed."

"And on the other side?"

"The other side is an outer wall of the house."

"Then the door of the room is nearer to the head of the backstairs than to the head of the frontstairs?"

Mr. Hilgay meditated. "Yes. Nearer to the backstairs."

"You agree now that it would, after all, have been possible for the Captain to have gone, or to have been carried, out of your house without your knowledge at any time during the evening?"

"Ye-es," said Mr. Hilgay. "Only the backstairs are not *used* by my boarders."

"Doubtless," snapped the coroner. "Still, as he probably didn't jump out of the window —"

"He must have walked down the backstairs after the staff had retired."

"But why should he do that?"

"I cannot guess. There could be no reason. He was a man of irreproachable respectability."

"Then it appears most probable that he was carried out?"

DOUBLOONS

"I cannot admit the possibility of foul play having occurred in my house."

"How many lodgers have you?"

"About sixty."

"You satisfy yourself that all are respectable?"

"I use my judgment."

The coroner put his lips together; then he abruptly turned to the jury.

"Any questions?"

The foreman of the jury, who was a retired chemist, would have given a guinea to have been able to think of a few shrewd questions to put to Mr. Hilgay. But he could devise nothing, and Mr. Hilgay stepped down, wondering why a philanthropist should receive the treatment of a suspected criminal.

The coroner resumed the contemplation of the chromograph, and then an old negro, dressed in ample shining broadcloth, with a red necktie, was manoeuvred by a policeman into the witness-box. He was clearly in a high state of nervous excitement, and the tears were starting from his eyes.

"What is your name, my man?" began the coroner.

"My name, judge? My name Marse Coco, sah."

"But your real name?"

"My name Marse Coco, sah. I been called Marse Coco ebber since I was cook at de Ice-House." He spoke in a thin, whining, high-pitched voice — the voice of his race.

"The Ice-House?"

"Yes, sah. In Broad Street. Bridgetown, judge."

"Bridgetown — Devonshire?"

DOUBLOONS

"No, sah. Bim, sah."

"Bim?"

"Barbadoes, sah. You see, sah, Ice-House, big restaurant, sah. I was de head cook, sah. And de udder niggers, dey call me Marse Coco because I was so 'spectable, judge. Captain Pollexfen, he took me 'way from dar."

"You knew Captain Pollexfen?"

"Yes, sah. I was one of his bes' friends, sah. We was berry good chums, sah."

"And he took you away from the Ice-House?"

"Yes, sah. He took Marse Coco to be cook on his ship — de 'Cobra,' sah."

"What line?"

"No line, sah. Jus' a dam tramp, sah."

"Do not swear, my man."

"I'se too sorry I spoke disrespec'ful, sah. But she was jus' a dam tramp, sah."

"Was that long ago?"

"Long ago, judge? I should say it was long ago. It was twenty years ago."

"And you stayed with the Captain?"

"Yes, sah. I stood by dat 'bominable ship sixteen years, judge, because I liked de Captain."

"And then you left the ship?"

"De ship left us, judge. She sank in Carlisle Bay, judge."

"Who were her owners?"

"Oh, me Gawd, sah! Don't you ask me who her owners were, because I don't know, sah."

"And what did you do after that?"

DOUBLOONS

"I jus' stopped in Bridgetown, sah, and sold guava cheese and udder good fings to de ships, sah."

"And the Captain?"

"He left Bim, sah, in a Royal Mail boat, sah."

"That was fou years ago, eh? When did you meet him again?"

The sing-song voice fell a little as the negro answered.

"I had to leave Barbadoes, judge; 'count of difficulty wid colored pussons. I shipped cook on anudder boat, sah, and I come to Southampton, judge. And there I sees de Captain, sah, on de quay at Southampton."

"When was that?"

"In January. And I run aft' him like de debbil, judge. He berry glad to see me. He bring me to London, sah. He say he gwine back to Bim soon, and he take me, because he want for me to help him."

"With what?"

"A secret, judge! Must I tell you, judge?"

"Certainly."

"Treasure, sah! Hidden treasure! Sunk treasure! He tell me, and he tell nobody else, judge."

The Court smiled.

"So the Captain was going to Barbadoes again to seek for treasure, eh? Did he tell you what he had been doing during the four years?"

"He had been Captain of anudder dam tramp, sah — beg pardon, judge."

"What was the name of the ship?"

"I don't know, sah. But he been to Russian ports, sah."

"And how soon were you to go to Barbadoes?"

DOUBLOONS

"Soon, sah! Oh! Soon! But de Captain couldn't settle wid his owners, sah. I not understand all dat. Den he fall ill, sah."

"When did you last see him?"

"Tuesday, judge, Tuesday afternoon. Two o'clock, sah."

"He was better then?"

"Oh yes, sah. Plenty better, judge! Plenty better. He quite cheerful."

"What did he tell you when you last saw him?"

"He said, 'We start soon,' sah. He said he take berths next week, sah."

"Do you know if the Captain had any friends?"

"He had Massa Coco, sah."

"Yes, but others?"

"No, sah."

"No relatives?"

The negro paused.

"Yes, sah. He hab relatives."

"Well?"

"He hab a brudder, sah. Free weeks ago I go wid him to see his brudder, sah. At de Obelisk Hotel. Waterloo Road, sah. I told all dat to de gem'man yesterday. You see, judge, I was just comin' to see de Captain Wednesday mornin' — I lodge in Seven Dials, sah — and I sees his corpse, sah. I cry and howl, sah. Den de policeman asks me questions — most rude, 'pertinent policeman, sah."

"Yes; but about the brother? You say the Captain saw his brother at the Obelisk Hotel. What passed between them?"

"Don't ask me, judge. I dunno. But I heard de Captain speak berry sharp to his brudder."

DOUBLOONS

"Have you seen the brother since?"

"No, sah."

"Any other relatives?"

"Yes, sah. Lady, sah. De Captain's daughter, sah. But Captain tell me he not speak to his daughter for long time. Because she gone on de stage. Hussy, sah! It made de Captain very angry. I walk down Kingsway wid him one day, and he show me her picksher very big on de walls."

"Ah! What was her name?"

"On de picksher, sah?"

"Yes."

"Giralda, sah."

At the introduction of this famous name a rustling, uneasy movement passed like a wave across the court; and everybody, except the coroner, the policeman, and Mr. Varcoe, whom Philip now noticed for the first time, seemed to be suddenly excited and expectant. An hour ago there had been only one reporter — a youth — at the reporter's table. There were now three. A silence ensued, and the gas sang in the silence.

"Can you throw any light on the death of the Captain?" demanded the coroner, in a low tone.

"No, no, judge! No, I can't frow no light," whined the negro.

The coroner glanced at the jury.

"About this treasure?" the foreman inquired.

"Don't ask me! Don't ask Coco!" the negro droned.

"Captain never told me nuffin."

But the foreman had at length thought of a masterly query.

DOUBLOONS

“What were you doing on the night of Tuesday?”

“You are not bound to answer that question unless you like,” said the coroner quickly.

“Oh! I answer it, judge,” Coco observed, wiping his eyes anew. “I was just a-sleeping, as I sleep ebbery night. I give my ’dress to de young policeman, sah.”

Mr. Varcoe stepped on tiptoe to the coroner’s desk, and whispered in his ear.

“The inquiry is adjourned till 10.30 to-morrow,” said the coroner, consulting his watch.

And in an instant he was packing his brown bag.

VI

THE VERDICT

PHILIP'S feelings, to his own surprise, were profoundly stirred by the drama of the inquest. The vision of the sailor's corpse remained with him; he could not get rid of it. And then the sudden disclosure of the name of Giralda! And the hounds of justice, at fault yet, and yapping with eager, puzzled indecision, but sure ultimately to find the scent and to single out the murderer from six millions of his fellow-men and mark him for doom! It was impossible that the murderer should escape! He existed at that moment! Somewhere, probably in London, he lived and breathed, ate and tried to sleep.

Philip had half-promised to dine with Sir Anthony, but yielding to an instinct for solitude he ate economically in Euston Road, and hours elapsed afterwards before he could persuade himself to go to his quarters at the Corner House. The illness of Mrs. Upottery had prevented her from vacating her room, and on the previous night Philip had slept at Sir Anthony's flat, under the elaborate ministrations of Oxwich. But now the cubicle of the dead captain was empty, precisely that and no other; the police had finished with it; Mr. Hilgay had offered it, with a certain air of apology, to Philip. And Philip, after an instant's irrational hesitation, had accepted it.

DOUBLOONS

As he passed into the Corner House, he saw Mr. Hilgay at his post in the office. They nodded to each other — Mr. Hilgay's thoughts were too deep for words that evening — and Philip went up-stairs. The cubicle, with its electric light, its narrow green bed, its combined wash-stand and dressing-table, its arm-chair, its row of hooks, its polished bare floor, and its three reproductions, costing threepence each, of masterpieces from the National Gallery, had the mildest appearance in the world. It seemed to be leagues away from any tragedy. He looked around. The dimensions of the place were so restricted that, owing to the situation of the toilet-stand, he could not shut the door without almost getting behind it. He examined everything with a sharp, affrighted curiosity, and then he shut the door, pressing himself against the bed in order to do so. Chance directed his gaze to the corner behind the door, and he observed that the boy-cleaners had demonstrated that they were human and boyish by omitting that corner from their scheme of things. In the daytime that corner would be in shadow, and it was only due to the position of the electric light that he could now see the pile of dust there. He bent down and picked up a small amber-colored object; it was a tooth of a tortoise-shell comb. He attached no importance to this discovery until it occurred to him that the comb to which that three-inch tooth had belonged could not have been a man's comb; it must have formed part of the structure of a woman's coiffure.

At the same moment the electric light went out, the hour being midnight.

He got into bed, and did not sleep till five in the morning, a

DOUBLOONS

distressing phenomenon conceivably due to the violent pattern of Sir Anthony's pajamas, a choice sample of which he was wearing, as his own little bag of necessities had disappeared since the disappearance, by Jiu-Jitsu, of the navvy who had assaulted Mr. Hilgay in the hall of the Corner House.

He overslept himself, and had to interrupt his régime of economy by taking a cab to the coroner's court; and even then he was late. The court was packed: an extra table had been brought in for the reporters.

The ganger in charge of the sewer trench was being examined.

"How long would it take to dig out the earth, put the corpse in, and restore the earth?" the coroner was asking.

"That depends!" grumbled the ganger.

"On what?"

"It depends whether him as was doing it knowed one end of a spade from the other."

"Should you say that the person who buried the corpse knew one end of a spade from the other?"

"Ay! As well as I do myself."

"The work was well done by an expert?"

"Yes."

"Then how long should you say it took?"

"Piece work it 'ud take about three-quarters of an hour, or hardly. Day wage it might ha' taken a couple o' hour."

The coroner checked a smile. "That will do, my man."

"Yes, that's all very well," the ganger muttered. "But what about my expenses? What about my expenses?" And

DOUBLOONS

he was led away repeating in a disgusted diminuendo murmur, "What about my expenses?"

The next witnesses were the watchman, Charlie, whose place Philip had taken, and who stated that he had been summoned to his wife's bedside by a boy aged about twelve; and two much more prosperous individuals, the landlord of the Obelisk Hotel, in Waterloo Road, and Mr. Oscar Talke, the lessee and manager of the Metropolitan Theater and Pleasure House.

The landlord stated that the man whom Coco asserted to be the deceased's brother had quitted the hotel at five o'clock on Monday, the 12th February, saying that he should be back in five minutes, and had left a new empty portmanteau and an unpaid bill of twenty-two shillings and threepence behind him; he had never returned.

Mr. Oscar Talke stated that on the afternoon of the 14th February he had received a telegram from Miss Giralda saying that she could not play that night. Her part had since been taken by an understudy, as Miss Giralda had made no further sign of life. Her flat in Shaftesbury Avenue was shut up, and her servants had been dismissed. He had no knowledge of Miss Giralda's parentage. Mr. Talke resembled the ganger in this, that he seemed to have a grievance against the entire court; he spoke as though someone had murdered Captain Pollexfen in order to spite Mr. Oscar Talke.

Then, after a minion of Mr. Varcoe had described to the coroner how he had searched the cubicle of the dead man, and found nothing in the shape of a clue, nothing even to indicate the slightest struggle, Philip heard the coroner's

DOUBLOONS

officer discreetly enunciating: "Philip Masters," and he stepped into the box and was sworn.

The coroner examined him with a swift and impartial glance.

"What have you got to tell us?" asked the coroner shortly.

Philip related, nervously at first, his encounter with the watchman, and how, after his sleep, he had seen a mysterious form emerging from the sewer trench.

"What time was that?"

"About three in the morning."

"Did the figure seem to you to disappear into the Corner House or up Little Girdlers Alley?"

"I cannot be sure, but my impression is, up the Alley."

"Anything else?"

"I found a bit of stone with a finger-mark on it — which I now think must have been in blood — in the trench, and I put it in my bag. But the bag has been mislaid."

"Mislaid?"

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

And Philip produced the fragment of tortoise-shell which he had discovered behind the door of the cubicle. It was examined by the coroner and by the jury, and made a sensation. The reporters rejoiced in excellent copy, and foresaw a *cause célèbre* of the first order.

"Now, Mr. Masters, you say that you were practically penniless on Tuesday night, and that you accepted the offer of the watchman on that account. You no longer have the air of being penniless; in fact, I should say quite the reverse."

DOUBLOONS

Philip, who wore, indeed, a new frock-coat made by a great artist, not to mention a dark necktie chosen by Oxwich, quailed involuntarily at the coroner's tone. His absolute innocence notwithstanding, he had a tremor as the light of justice came beating down into the privacies of his career. He informed the coroner that a friend had furnished him with money.

"Ah!" remarked the coroner, and resumed his stare at the Prince of Wales's portrait. Philip comprehended that the coroner, while reserving his opinion, had done with him.

"That is all, sir," the coroner's officer whispered to the coroner.

"Excuse me," said a firm, rich, contralto voice, "I wish to be heard."

And a middle-aged, stout, rather tall woman stood up and pushed forward to the front of the court.

"Who are you, madam?" the coroner blandly inquired.

"I am Mrs. Upottery," was the reply. "I was ill in bed yesterday, and I ought to be ill in bed to-day, but seeing my name dragged into the papers this morning I got up, weak as I was, and I have come here to clear my character."

"If you can assist this inquiry," said the coroner, "I shall be glad to hear you, but I am not aware that your character has been assailed."

"Not assailed!" protested the woman. "Then —"

"Calm yourself, my good lady," the coroner soothed her. "And take the oath."

She took the oath as Caroline Upottery, widow.

"Now," said the coroner.

DOUBLOONS

Mrs. Upottery was an upstanding woman, and her face, not remarkable for its alluring femininity, indicated unusual strength of character. It was a square, somewhat rugged face, wrinkled, with thin, expressive lips, a slight mustache above the upper lip, a thick nose above the mustache, and a small black bonnet above the nose. She wore complete mourning. Her black-gloved hands were crossed at her waist, and in one hand was a purse and a black-bordered handkerchief. As a bulwark of the respectability of Mr. Hilgay's establishment she left nothing to be desired.

"It was said yesterday," she began, "that I occupied the next room to the late Captain." She glanced round the court superciliously, and in particular showed her contempt for the jury. "And what if I did? I couldn't help it, could I?"

"My good woman —"

"Excuse me, I'm not your good woman," she said, leaving the coroner for the first time at momentary loss for a retort.

"If this is all you have to say —"

"It isn't all I have to say. But don't I know that all London will be putting two and two together this blessed day, and saying that Mrs. Upottery had the room next to the Captain's, and it was in a boarding-house, and there you are! My character gone! Especially as there was no room on the other side of the Captain's. So I've come to explain."

"What?"

"Well, for one thing, I think I'd better tell you that that tooth out of a comb that that there swell young man found behind the Captain's door came out of one of my combs."

DOUBLOONS

"Yes?" the coroner encouraged her. "And how did it get into his room?"

"It got there like this," said Mrs. Upottery. "I was engaged to be married to the poor Captain."

And she burst into sobs — sobs which had at least the effect of quenching an incipient laughter in the public assembled.

"This engagement was secret?" questioned the coroner kindly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Upottery, controlling herself. "Henry wished it to be so."

Instantly the coroner and the reporters made a note to the effect that the deceased's Christian name was Henry.

"Was it of long standing?"

"I came to the Corner House on the 11th February —"

"That was the day after the Captain arrived," the coroner put in.

"I think it was. And the Captain took a fancy to me at once. He didn't say much. He didn't say anything. But I could see it. I wanted to be fair with him, so I took an opportunity of telling him that I'd buried my third. But that made no difference. He was set on me. It was in his eye. He found out that I had the habit of taking a walk in the Embankment Gardens most fine mornings, and he followed me there. Then he fell ill. I used to nurse him a little, but quiet like, because in them boarding-houses you can't be too particular, and no one ever saw me in his room. Then he proposed to me. Said he'd never loved anyone for twenty years, since his first wife died, and would I join my fate with his, and I said I would. And he was sitting up in bed. And he kissed me, and my

DOUBLOONS

comb fell out, and I trod on it, and that's the explanation of that tooth, and I'm telling you because these things always do come to light sooner or later, and it's best as I should keep nothing back, delicate as my position is."

"When was the proposal?"

"Monday last."

"The day before the Captain met his death?"

"The day before the Captain was murdered," said Mrs. Upottery with terrible emphasis. And there was a silence.

The revelation of the singular idyl had a strange effect on everybody present. It appeared to be so intimate a commingling of the farcical and the tragic that people wanted to grin and weep in the same moment.

"The courtship was quiet brief, Mrs. Upottery?" ventured the coroner.

"Yes. But we fell in love at first sight," said the wrinkled creature who had represented to Captain Pollexfen the charm and sweet seductiveness of her sex. And she said it in such a voice that none of her hearers dared move a muscle.

"Have you any theory as to the Captain's death?" the coroner asked.

"I have," said she. "And it is more than a theory. Henry was captain of the steamship 'Volga' that traded to Odessa —"

"What line?"

"I don't know what line. How should I know what line? You men ought to be able to find that out, surely. There aren't forty steamships named 'Volga,' I suppose?" She seemed hurt.

DOUBLOONS

"Continue," said the coroner.

"His boat was in Odessa Harbor while the riots were on there. And a Russian police officer that was being pursued by the mob took refuge in the Captain's dinghy, and the Captain rowed him off to his ship and saved his life. The leaders of the mob called on the Captain to give him up, and he wouldn't. Not him! Then the Captain received a note from a secret society sentencing him to death. Now, I'm sure the Captain was killed by a secret agent. I know he was."

"Why do you think that?" asked the coroner.

"I slipped into Henry's room after he'd been out on Tuesday evening, about nine o'clock, just to see if he wasn't any worse for his walk, and there was another man in the room, a young man — a foreigner, I'm certain. And Henry says to me: 'I'm busy with this gentleman for a minute, Mrs. Upottery,' he says. And the man bowed in a foreign way, and I walked out. I never thought at the moment that there might be anything wrong."

"Did you see this mysterious foreigner go?"

"I didn't see him go, and I didn't hear him go. And I never saw the Captain alive again."

"And you heard nothing during the night?"

"Nothing; and I never saw the Captain alive again," she repeated, her black-bordered handkerchief in her eyes.

"I am obliged to you for coming forward," said the coroner. "If you have nothing else to tell us, you may step down."

"One moment," said the foreman of the jury. Mrs. Upot-

DOUBLOONS

tery turned on him like a tigress. "Was the Captain in fear of his life?"

"He *pretended* he wasn't, poor brave fellow!" answered Mrs. Upottery.

And she stepped down. She had awed the court, the jury, and the public. There were men present who regarded the Captain's death as a narrow escape on his part of having married Mrs. Upottery.

"One more witness, sir," said the coroner's officer. "Just come, sir."

"Who is that?"

A well-groomed, youngish man, obviously of the City, stood up.

"I had instructions from my principals to take a cab here at once, Mr. Coroner, and offer you all the help in their power." The voice was glib.

"And who are your principals?"

"Messrs. Graham, Farquhar & Graham, of Cannon Street, ship-owners — owners of the 'Volga' and two other steamers."

"Swear him," said the coroner.

The new witness gave the name of Lancelot Sprague, and described himself as manager to Messrs. Graham, Farquhar & Graham.

"The late Captain Pollexfen was in your firm's service?" the coroner began.

"He had been. After his last voyage he retired."

"When was that?"

"About seven weeks ago."

DOUBLOONS

"He had been with you long?"

"Several years. My principals were perfectly satisfied with him."

"He retired simply because he wished to retire, then?"

"Yes. At least, he gave no other reason."

"How old was he?"

"Rather over sixty, I should say."

"Then, as he was retiring, he must have had some savings, something to live on?"

"He had over two thousand pounds invested in our business. It was yielding him an excellent percentage. And my principals were very much surprised, not only at his sudden retirement, but at his strongly-expressed desire to have back his capital at once. When he was informed that capital could not be disturbed so quickly as that without serious inconvenience, and perhaps loss, he was annoyed — in fact, he was excessively annoyed. He seemed in the highest degree anxious to handle all the money he possessed at the earliest possible moment. He called on us several times to this end. Ultimately we arranged to satisfy him. The two thousand pounds was found and paid over to him, and we hold his receipt in full."

"When was that?"

"Last Tuesday about three o'clock."

"You paid him by check!"

"Yes, in the first place. But he was a peculiar old man in some respects, and didn't hold checks in much esteem. He wanted notes. So we got him to endorse the check, and we sent a messenger round to Lloyd's Bank to cash it before the

DOUBLOONS

bank closed. And we handed, shortly before four o'clock, twenty-one notes of a hundred pounds to Captain Pollexfen, together with twenty-one pounds six and sixpence in gold and silver."

"Then he left your office with this sum in his possession?"

"Precisely."

An immense sensation in court.

"Did you keep the numbers of the notes?"

"Most certainly. I am instructed to state that it was not until we opened our newspapers this morning that we had the slightest idea of what had happened to Captain Pollexfen. Otherwise, of course, my principals would have put themselves at your service yesterday."

"I am indebted to your principals," observed the coroner with a slight ironic inflection.

"Not at all, sir." And Mr. Lancelot Sprague's brief hour of publicity was over.

"Mrs. Upottery," the coroner called out.

"Sir." The mourning woman stood up.

"Did the deceased mention anything to you of his having received this sum of two thousand odd pounds?"

"I did not see him privately after his return from the City."

"But he returned before dinner, according to the evidence of Mr. Hilgay. Did you not meet him at dinner?"

"I met him at dinner; we sat at opposite ends of the table, however, from motives of prudence."

"Did he never tell you that he was expecting this sum?"

"I never encouraged him to talk about money," said Mrs. Upottery. "I was not marrying him for his money."

"You still think, in face of the evidence of the ship-owners,

DOUBLOONS

that his murder was the vengeance of some Russian secret society?"

"I do," said Mrs. Upottery, and added grimly: "Two thousand pounds would be useful enough to their precious revolutionary cause, I imagine."

And half the men in court thought: "This is no ordinary woman."

"About the negro Coco's story of treasure? Did the Captain ever discuss such a thing with you?"

"Oh, *that!*" replied Mrs. Upottery curtly. "That was a harmless craze of the poor Captain's. I should have stopped that, of course; I humored it for the time being."

Her heavy contralto voice vibrated curiously in the packed and intent chamber. It seemed to continue vibrating after she had sat down.

"Gentlemen," said the coroner, facing the jury. "You have heard the evidence, which is of a sufficiently contradictory nature, and yet not extremely complex. We have learned that the deceased went out in the afternoon of Tuesday from this singular lodging-house of Hilgay's, after having been ill or indisposed for a week. He was in the office of Messrs. Graham, Farquhar, & Graham at three o'clock. He stayed there till nearly four. He was seen to reënter the lodging-house later. Presumably he went to his room. He dined as usual. He went out afterwards for about half an hour, and returned about eight. There is no evidence to show where he went. The last of the witnesses to see him alive was apparently Mrs. Upottery. You will note what she said as to the presence of a second person in his room. We have no evidence to show how or

DOUBLOONS

when that person entered the lodging-house or how or when he left. From the time of the brief visit of Mrs. Upottery to the next morning we lose sight of the deceased. And then we find him buried in a trench opposite the house. The doctor conjectures that he died about midnight.

“Now, was the murder committed inside or outside the house? The only evidence bearing on this point is the absence of noise, which would point to a murder outside the house. But, on the other hand — and this is very important — why should the deceased consent to leave the house surreptitiously, as he must have left it if he left it alive, by means of the back-stairs? Certainly he *might* have done so, for whereas the lights at the back of the house are turned out at eleven, the Captain was not dead till twelve.

“If the deceased was killed in the house, he may have been killed either by the foreign-looking person whom Mrs. Upottery saw in his room, or by a lodger in the house, or by some other person who surreptitiously introduced himself into the house. Was more than one person concerned in the murder? In this connection, you doubtless noted that the deceased, in the opinion of the doctor, weighed perhaps eleven stone, a fairly heavy weight to be carried down the backstairs of the house, or even to be lowered with ropes from a window. But, according to the evidence of the ganger, the spade work of the burial was done by an experienced hand, and in this matter an experienced hand would be a strong hand — a hand possibly capable of manipulating even eleven stone of dead weight without making too much noise.

“With reference to the medical evidence, I should point

DOUBLOONS

out that the localities of the hemorrhages in the brain, the pons variolii, and the fourth ventricle, are the cardiac and respiratory centers, and that these being affected, the deceased did in all probability die instantaneously.

“As regards light on the motive of the crime, you have the eternal hidden treasure tale, discredited by the fiancée of the deceased. You have Mrs. Upottery’s bizarre story of a Russian secret society’s vengeance. And, lastly, you have the fact that the deceased had two thousand one hundred and twenty-one pounds six and sixpence in his pocket, and that this money, together with all his papers, has disappeared. I leave your sagacity to choose between the three possibilities. The disappearance of the deceased’s relatives is either a remarkable coincidence or something more than a coincidence; but I do not think it will influence your decision. The disappearance of the bag belonging to Philip Masters, a young man who does not appear to take very good care of his belongings, is also a remarkable coincidence, since the bag contained apparently an invaluable clue to the murderer. Assuming the finger-mark to have been in blood, it is interesting to note that as the deceased was not externally injured, the murderer must have injured himself in the process of burying. Gentlemen, you will consider your verdict.”

The coroner began to write, as though he had suddenly forgotten the very existence of the jury.

The sixteen men that constituted the jury turned to each other, and whispered together with blanched and important faces. But in spite of the anxiety of the long gray beard to weigh every *pro* and *con* in a balance, the formality

DOUBLOONS

of deliberation could not be prolonged more than a few minutes.

The foreman cleared his throat.

"We are of opinion that the deceased, Henry Pollexfen, was murdered by some person or persons unknown."

There was a rush for the doors. The drama was over.

Outside Philip met Sir Anthony, who had been unable to force an entrance into the court.

"Man!" cried the baronet excitedly. "Why didn't you come last night? I've something I must tell you at once."

VII

THE "FLESH-AND-BLOOD"

SIR Anthony Diding's Panhard was waiting a few yards up the street, but such was the crowd and such the excitement of the crowd that it was impossible to start the car at once. The multitude refused to acknowledge even the existence of that murderous vehicle.

Fifty people stood in its paths staring at the door of the court-house, and violently discussing the sensation of the day, just as if the car had been invisible. This was the first indication of the immense and unique interest which the case of the dead sea captain was arousing in the most *blasé* of capitals.

The chauffeur not daring to commit homicide, Sir Anthony impatiently supplanted him, and executed a prolonged orchestral fantasia upon the horn (he prided himself upon the power of his horn, which was calculated to damage the ear as effectually as his four Ducellier lamps could damage the eye), whereupon a little lane was reluctantly formed, and the Panhard departed amid the execrations of quidnuncs who detested the ostentatious arrogance of excessive wealth.

Philip sprang to Sir Anthony's side, and the chauffeur tumbled into the tonneau. The car slid round the corner at thirty miles an hour.

DOUBLOONS

"Idiots!" ejaculated the baronet between his set teeth, with a glance backward at the crowd.

"May I ask the reason of this seduction?" Philip murmured. "Where am I being taken to?"

"We're going to lunch at the 'Flesh-and-Blood,'" Tony replied curtly. "But I can't talk now."

"You'll find yourself talking to a policeman soon," said Philip, "if you keep on at this rate. However, as it isn't my car, and it isn't my license —" He finished with a gesture to indicate that his life was of minor importance.

Tony kept on. He crossed Oxford Circus at a speed which ought to have secured his expulsion from the Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland, and his progress thence to Albemarle Street was an outrage upon decency and an incentive to revolution on the part of the honest working classes. At length he drew up before the rich bow-windowed façade of No. 111, and flung himself and Philip on to the pavement with a vast explosive sigh of relief.

"Ouf!" he breathed. "I'm better!" and to the chauffeur: "Be back at four."

The chauffeur touched his hat respectfully, but not without a secret idea about the advisability of finding a fresh master.

"I nearly went off my head trying to get into that confounded coroner's court," said Tony, wiping his face. "People standing behind the door — it wouldn't open! Cost me half a crown to the policeman to keep my blessed nose at the crack of the door — and then I couldn't hear properly! You know how highly strung I am. It upset me! You ought to have

DOUBLOONS

come round last night, old chap. I waited dinner an hour, and I didn't sleep a wink."

Philip gazed at the young ingenuous face.

"What's up?" he inquired mildly. "What's the matter?"

Tony whispered, with an eye on the footman at the portals:

"Giralda is the matter! Come along in."

They entered the marble foyer of the Physique Club, referred to by everyone with the least pretension to social style as the "Flesh-and-Blood." The Physique was certainly the club of the moment. It had a vogue second to none, and though its subscription was twenty guineas per annum, the membership reached one thousand eight hundred, including over four hundred women. For it was essential to the aim and purpose of the Physique that it should be a "cock-and-hen" affair.

It had not escaped the attention of a number of intelligences in the aristocracy, the plutocracy, and the theatrical profession — all diligent readers of the daily press — that the British race was physically deteriorating. Various causes, it appeared, from the professionalization of football to the increasingly absurd craze for competitive examinations, were contributing to the gradual extinction of a once hardy and herculean stock, and the watchful patriotic intelligences had decided that something must be done to arrest this gradual extinction. They saw that it was the duty of the aristocracy, the plutocracy, and the theatrical profession to set an example to the rest of the nation, and the Physique Club was started. It existed for the cult of the body. It had swimming-baths (in its first year the question of mixed bathing had nearly

DOUBLOONS

wrecked it) and seventeen other sorts of baths, fencing saloons, billiard rooms, a skating-rink, athletic courts, boxing-rings, shooting galleries, a ballroom, and several bridge-rooms (for repose); also manicure, pedicure, massage, tonsorial, complexion, and figure departments; also its own staff of English and American dentists; also cricket, football, and hockey fields at Wembley Park, golf links at Wimbledon, and a pack of harriers at Woburn Sands; also a restaurant superior to that of any other club in London. Nothing was omitted that might help to check corporeal decay. The premises were beautiful and luxurious to the last degree, because it is part of any proper physical method that the eye must never be offended. There was certainly a reading-room, but it was not quite good form to let one's self be seen there; the mind was supposed to get more than sufficient nourishment at the tape-machine in the foyer.

Sir Anthony, after writing Philip's name in a morocco-bound folio in the foyer, led him to the restaurant, built and decorated in marble, like the foyer, and like the baths. Music was forbidden in the restaurant, lest it might distract the attention of eaters from the process of eating — one of the most critical passages in the body's daily history. The two were met on the threshold by the famous *maitre d'hôtel*. Dumilâtre, from Ciro's at Monte Carlo, specially imported, not for his knowledge of *gourmandize* (which was, however, immense), but for his manner. For Dumilâtre's manner was ecclesiastical, nay, ritualistic; it said to each person entering the restaurant: "Now let us approach with due solemnity the great crisis of the day. Let us give all our brains to the selection

DOUBLOONS

of a refined and suitable meal." It was inimitable, that manner, and it convinced and awed even the most careless eaters.

Dumilâtre, long and thin, with a long, romantic mustache, led his patients to a quiet corner of the room.

"Quite a simple lunch, Dumilâtre," said Tony.

"Quite a simple lunch? *Bien!*" said Dumilâtre.

And he seemed to retire like a poet within the mysterious grottoes of his own brain.

The clients waited breathless.

"Caviar de Sterlet," chanted Dumilâtre at length, gazing at Tony's eyes. He knew Tony's fondness for caviar. "Eggs a la Grand Duc. Baron de Pauillac." (This dish might have been a peer of the realm, so grandiose was Dumilâtre's enunciation.) "Asparagus Mousseline." Then a pause, and suddenly with a flash of genius. "Parfait au Moka."

He smiled ecstatically, full of the consciousness that he was performing with the finest ability his important share in the physical salvation of the Anglo-Saxon race.

"And the wine," Tony said: "I'm run down. A little fizz, eh?"

"As monsieur wishes!" said Dumilâtre, his tone indicating that champagne was not the wine for such a repast as he had created.

"What, then?"

"Mouton Rothschild, or possibly St. Jaques."

"St. Jaques," Tony decided, looking at Philip for approval.

Whereupon Dumilâtre retired to give orders and to recuperate, while two acolytes prepared the table. The day

DOUBLOONS

was yet young, and not another patient was in the restaurant.

"Phil," the baronet began, his mouth half-full of caviar, "you remember me telling you on Wednesday how I'd sat in the same stall for seventy-five nights running to see a girl act?"

"You said seventy-three," Philip corrected him.

"Did I? Well, seventy-three. I'm not sure, but I've got it ticked off in Whitaker's Almanac at the flat. Well, it was Giralda I used to go and see."

"The deuce it was! Then you know her?"

"It's like this. I know her, and I don't know her. She wasn't that sort, you perceive; and although I half-buried her in flowers, she wouldn't have anything to do with me. I imagined I'd cured myself of the passion — for it was a passion, my boy — but I find I haven't. When I saw her name in the papers last night I nearly went mad. Yes, I did. I nearly went mad. Phil, Giralda has got to be tracked, wherever she is. She may be in danger."

"Was she beautiful?" Philip asked.

"Good heavens, man! You don't mean to say you don't know whether Giralda is beautiful or not! If she isn't the most beautiful woman on the stage, she's jolly near it. Why, every fellow in the parish of St. James's is, or has been, in love with her. Never seen her act?"

"No,"

"Impossible! She gets a hundred guineas a week — guineas! Yes, thanks, bring the eggs — and some butter."

"I've not been to the theater since I reached years of dis-

DOUBLOONS

cretion," Philip exclaimed. "That's the reason I've no small talk. Besides, I was on duty every night at the Jiu-Jitsu School."

"But her portrait, man!"

"What about it?"

Tony directed his friend's attention to an exceedingly brilliant oil-painting of a young woman in classical costume that was let into the overmantel above the great fireplace of the *salle à manger*. "That's Pettifer, R.A.'s portrait of her, given by him to the club. As the goddess Hygeia, you know. What do you think of it?"

Philip gazed a long time.

"If she really has disappeared," said he quietly, "she must be found. A woman like that oughtn't to get lost. It's sheer waste."

"I should think so!" the baronet agreed heartily. "Why, you know, 'Corn in Egypt' — that's the musical comedy at the Metro.— would have been nothing without her. I ought to know — I saw it seventy — seventy-three times."

"How long has she been before the public?" Philip asked.

"Well, she's been before the *public* ten years," said Sir Anthony. "She began at fifteen in the provinces, and in the provinces she stopped for eight years. Then Talkee-talkie discovered her in a pantomime at Hanley, and brought her to London. She was the rage inside of a week — the rage! There's a hotel pension in Bloomsbury called the 'Giralda,' and I'm told it's always crowded by people who like the name. And I can understand it, my boy. What do you think of that?" and the baronet paused for a reply.

DOUBLOONS

Philip continued to stare at the portrait.

"That is fame!" he murmured, "and to think that she was the daughter of that old sailor!" he added.

"Yes, astonishing, isn't it?" said the baronet.

"I suppose you wanted to marry her?" Philip observed.

"Why of course!" said the baronet. "I'd marry her tomorrow if she'd give me the chance."

"And yet you don't know anything of her!"

"But I'm in *love* with her, you cuckoo!" protested the baronet. "You've never seen her. You don't know what love is. You always were like something between an ice and an icicle. Waiter, bring the Parfait au Moka."

"Indeed!" said Philip. "And how do you propose to begin finding your Giralda? Do you suppose she's hiding, or she's been kidnapped, or what? Something may have happened to her."

"Happened to her?" exclaimed Tony. "What can have happened to her?"

"How do I know?" Philip parried.

They both looked again at the proud and beautiful face over the fireplace. Surely, nothing sinister could have occurred to that being made for joy and delight!

"I shall go to Scotland Yard and see Varcoe," said Tony. "Eh?"

"And then?"

"I shall employ means to persuade him that the discovery of Giralda's whereabouts is the most important part of the Pollexfen case. These matters can always be arranged."

DOUBLOONS

"And when you've found her you'll claim your reward in the shape of her hand, eh?" Philip smiled.

"You don't understand love," said Tony shortly. "Come up-stairs, and have a Teofani."

He paid the bill at the desk, and Dumilâtre dismissed them above with a gesture of benediction. It was now one o'clock, and there were a number of people in the restaurant. The reading-room up-stairs was empty, as usual, except for an acquaintance of Tony's, who, after explaining in a rather shamefaced manner that he was only perusing the advertisements of mansions to be let or sold in *Country Life*, hurried away. Tony, lighting a cigarette, strolled to one of the bow-windows and looked down the vista of the street. At the corner of Piccadilly men were selling early editions of the evening papers on the strength of contents bills about the "Strange Street Sensation."

"Great Scott!" he cried suddenly, and again, "Great Scott!" followed by other expletives of a less unobjectionable nature.

Philip approached the window.

"I see nothing in particular," said Philip.

"Don't you see that woman in a victoria coming up?"

"The lady with a purple hat five sizes too large for her?"

"Yes; that's Josie."

"Is it really?"

"And I've asked her to lunch here, and I forgot all about it."

"And who is Josie?"

"Josephine Fire, my son. The other star at the Metro. Immense rivalry between her and Giralda."

DOUBLOONS

"You love her also, then?" Philip questioned.

"Well, you see, when I saw I had no chance with Giralda . . . you see, I was obliged . . . in fact . . . she's a stunning girl, is Josie. . . Truth, is, I fancy I've made her believe it was *she* that I went to see seventy-three nights running."

"And would you marry her, too, Tony?"

"We won't discuss that now," said the baronet. "You must join us at lunch — I insist. I can't stand it alone. I'm too unnerved."

"Why, surely!" said Philip. "One lunch more or less." He threw up his hands.

"We've just *got* to lunch again. I can't go and tell Josie I've forgotten her, can I? Come along. And, look here — of course, *I* mustn't mention Giralda to her. It wouldn't be quite nice; she already has her suspicions. But you can. You must bring the conversation round to Giralda. Josie's certain to know a lot of useful things about her. You must be very interested in Giralda. Understand?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you! Now, then! Her carriage has stopped. Quick!"

VIII

JOSEPHINE'S THEORY

“**N**OW, what can you offer us for lunch, Dumilâtre?” asked the baronet.

“Well,” Josephine Fire broke in. “Oysters we’ll begin with — Colchesters.”

“Certainly, madame,” Dumilâtre responded.

“And then a bit of lobster mayonnaise,” Josie proceeded. Dumilâtre forced himself to smile.

“And then chicken,” said Josephine.

“Yes, madame, certainly.”

“And then some nice ripe Gorgonzola.”

“And the wine?” Tony asked.

“Oh, I leave that to you,” said Josephine. “But fizz, of course.”

She looked round for applause at the two men and the high priest and the two acolytes, and they all applauded.

Josephine was one of your successful artists who have never doubted that their success is the most beneficent result of a reign of absolute justice in the world. She had a self-confidence which nothing could shake, and the situation to which she did not find herself equal had not yet arisen.

As Philip scanned surreptitiously her black eyes and heavy lips, her ample coiffure, her rich and strictly confined form,

DOUBLOONS

her long, pointed finger-nails, and her general lavishness, he thought — he could not help thinking — of the violent contrast between her and the woman of the portrait, and he stood amazed before Tony's all-embracing catholicity in love.

The second luncheon proceeded to the perfect satisfaction of Josephine, who took entire charge of it, and led both the eating and the talking. And Philip saw himself freed from the necessity of importing Giralda into the conversation, for Josephine remarked almost at once:

"I've got her dressing-room."

"Whose dressing-room?" Tony demanded.

"Giralda's, naturally! It's the best in the theater; and I ought to have had it before, really. I made Talkee-talkee give it me last night. That's why I'm in such a good humor this morning. It's a good thing for you he did give it to me; otherwise I should have been in an awful temper, and you know how I am when I'm cross. I'm charming when I'm cross, ain't I?"

"What's your theory about Giralda, Miss Fire?" Philip put in.

"Oh! So you've opened your mouth at last, Mr. Masters!" the bright angel observed, with gaiety.

"I am always afraid of chattering too much," Philip replied meekly.

"Masters has been *in* the inquest," said Tony. "So the thing's on his mind. Besides, he's rather interested in Giralda."

"Oh!" answered Josephine, carelessly. She had only one genuine interest in life — herself; but even she could not refuse to discuss the tremendous topic of the day. "Well, I've

DOUBLOONS

got a theory. At least, it isn't a theory. It's a cert. I know. I guessed it the very moment Talkee-talkee told me that Giralda had sent word that she couldn't play."

"And it is?"

"The Marquis, of course."

"Which Marquis? There are so many, and they are all alike."

"But surely if you are interested in Giralda you know about Toto," said Josephine. "The Marquis of Standego. They've run off together. That's what it is. He's younger than she is and as mad as a hatter. They've run off and got married, and they're shamming dead for a time, on account of his relations. She only kept him at arm's length for the sake of appearances, and she was quite right. Poor girl! I don't blame her. I pity her. He drinks, you know."

"Standego has disappeared, too?" Tony asked with gloomy astonishment. He knew all about the Marquis, and was filled with fear.

"Have *you* seen him lately?" Josie demanded curtly, with the air of treating a foolish question as it deserved to be treated.

"No," said Tony.

"Have you seen him since Giralda vanished?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, there you are!" she clinched the dialogue triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you I *knew*? Yes, fill it up, and your own, too, and try not to look like an undertaker at his mother's funeral, Mr. Masters."

Her generous laugh rang through the room.

DOUBLOONS

A footman intruded upon the feast.

"A person wishes to speak to you on the telephone, Sir Anthony," said the footman in a tone of discreet but sincere apology.

"What sort of a person?" The query came from Josephine.

"The person is at the Metropolitan Theater, and wants to know if Miss Fire is here with you, Sir Anthony."

"She is," said Miss Fire.

"The person wishes to speak to Miss Fire."

"Who is it?" demanded Josie peremptorily.

The footman had to consult the telephone. He returned and said:

"Mr. Varcoe, of Scotland Yard."

Josephine was genuinely taken aback, but she quickly recovered.

"If Mr. Varcoe, or Parcoe, wants to speak to me in such a hurry as all, that let him come round here; eh, Tony; I'm having my lunch."

"Yes, miss," said the footman.

"Do you know Mr. Varcoe, or Parcoe?" she inquired.

"Yes," the men answered simultaneously, and Tony added: "He's in charge of the Pollexfen case."

An uneasy hush fell upon the party.

The distance from the Metropolitan Theater and Pleasure House, that vast and curious pile, to the Physique Club, is exactly two thousand four hundred yards, and Mr. Varcoe covered it apparently in a winged hansom, for he entered the club restaurant within about eight minutes of the telephone-call. Sir Anthony introduced him to the *divette*, and his man-

DOUBLOONS

ner to her was all that she could desire. Except for a slight eccentricity in cuff-links, and for a certain facial romanticism, he was admirably disguised as a finished, faultless clubman. He refused to eat, having eaten — and he refused to take coffee, having taken coffee; but he accepted a kummel and one of Josie's cigarettes out of Josie's gold cigarette-case. And he babbled amiably of nothing, as though he had nothing to do and there were thirty-four hours in every day, until Josephine brought him to business.

"And are you a real detective?" she said. "I've never met one before."

"I'm happy to be the first," he bowed.

"What do you mean to detect in me?" she asked, glancing at him through half-closed eyes, with a suspiciousness that was only half-feigned.

"All the graces," he said. "One thing I particularly desired was your permission to examine your dressing-room, which I understand used to be Miss Giralda's. Mr. Talke, who has lunched with me, told me I could go in —"

"Oh, did he?"

"But naturally I refused, without your authority. Did Miss Giralda leave many of her things there?"

"Lots! The place was like a pawnshop, my dear man. I had most of them stuck up on a shelf over the door."

"If you would show me the things, you might be of very great assistance to me," said Mr. Varcoe. "Very great assistance. Perhaps you and I could have a chat, if it won't bore you." He succeeded in conveying to Josephine that the unraveling of the mystery which occupied him, if ever it were

DOUBLOONS

unreveled, would be mainly due to the aid of her shrewdness and special knowledge.

"Why, of course!" she answered. "Come round to-night after the first act. Here, have another cigarette, do!"

Philip was again staring, scarcely conscious that he did so, at the portrait of Giralda in the overmantel. Her calm and faintly ironic smile seemed to mock the luncheon party. He could now trace some resemblance between the portrait and the dead face of Pollexfen. There was the same nose, and the same position of the cheek-bones. And he thought of the old Captain lying in the mortuary, serene, indifferent, placid with the eternal placidity. He felt that he stood on the edge of the mystery as on the edge of a precipice, and that he must plunge into it. These others did not comprehend the terrible poetry that surrounded the baffling tragedy like an aura. He did not comprehend it himself, but he felt its power. He dimly glimpsed in the unknown murderer a ferocious and sublime personality, and, assuming the correctness of Josephine's theory, he saw in the synchronism of the daughter's elopement and the father's death, such a dramatic trick as Fate does not often play. As for the uncle —

"Have you found out anything about the brother of the Captain?" Josephine was asking.

Varcoe shook his head. "I was hoping you could tell me something."

"Giralda never talked about her people," said Josephine. "She was always awfully close. We all took her for an orphan. Then you've got no clue whatever?"

"To what?"

DOUBLOONS

"To Giralda's disappearance."

"Not yet."

"I will give you one, if you're good." She smiled proudly. And the name of the Marquis of Standego was on her vermillion lips when Philip interrupted, addressing the detective:

"I suppose you'll begin by finding out where Giralda is?"

"That is certainly an important part of the case," said the detective.

"I hope you will," said Philip with much earnestness, perceiving in Tony's eye a silent appeal to him to insist on this aspect of the matter.

"And you are not the first," murmured the detective.

"What do you mean?"

"I received last night a visit from a well-known gentleman who positively begged me to leave everything in order to discover Miss Giralda."

"Who was that?"

"Ah!" the detective answered, "I don't think I can —"

"Mr. Varcoe," Josephine imperiously commanded, "tell us at once."

The detective yielded.

"It was the Marquis of Standego," said he in a low voice. "His lordship was beside himself with grief and anxiety."

There was a pause. Tony caught his breath.

"What becomes of your theory?" Philip demanded phlegmatically of Josephine. And a lack of consideration for her in his tone made her furious.

"Oh, well —" she muttered, and stopped.

"Till to-night, then," said the detective, rising, and the

DOUBLOONS

party broke up. Sir Anthony, acutely disturbed, abandoned even the idea of his daily swim. As Philip left the room in the wake of the rest he threw a final lingering glance at the portrait. The portrait smiled there, but Giralda might be dead in some other part of London; and in yet another part of London the uncle might also be dead! Philip was conscious of a strange and powerful emotion.

The club was now crowded with members, and word had passed that Josephine Fire had been lunching with Sir Anthony and an unknown man with a square jaw, and the renowned detective Varcoe. The Pollexfen-Giralda mystery monopolized every intelligence, to the exclusion of even a decent regard for the nation's physical welfare. A crowd of male acquaintance took Josephine by storm in the foyer, and the name of Giralda flew about like a shuttlecock. Seven men assisted Tony to put Giralda's rival into her carriage.

Later, in the streets, the extraordinary prevalence of contents bills all crying out "Giralda!" gave Philip the notion that the whole of London was obsessed by the dire mystery.

IX

BEGINNING OF PHILIP'S INQUIRY

SOMETHING fresh was surely happening at the Corner House, where, as Mr. Hilgay had explained, there was a corner for everyone.

For as Philip walked up Kingsway in the afternoon of the double luncheon, he saw an immense crowd which filled Strange Street and bulged far into Kingsway, causing the traffic to describe a curve round its outer edge. The faces of the crowd all pointed in one direction, like vanes in a steady wind. And the occupants of the tops of motor omnibuses and the drivers of cabs and of vans, and the riders of newspaper-bicycles, and the pushers of hand-carts, twisted their necks as they passed in order to gaze to the last possible instant where the multitude gazed. It could only have been a curious coincidence that the clouds in the February sky were traveling in the same direction. The multitude gained and lost adherents every minute, as though it had been a popular cause but not a just one. Each pedestrian stopped, stared, raised himself on tiptoe, stared again vigorously, doggedly, manfully, and then departed, full of profound regret at the necessity to depart. But a few held on, heedless of everything save what they stared at; they had apparently been staring for hours, and they would be capable of staring for hours more. On the rim

DOUBLOONS

of the concourse, between the latest adherents and the traffic of London that rolled sparsely by, was a ragged man selling tooth-picks.

"What's up here?" Philip asked him.

"Penny! Real tortoise-shell! Penny! Real tortoise-shell!" cried the man raucously, intent on his own mercantile career.

"What's up here?" Philip then demanded of a starrer in a silk hat.

The personage turned his head, indicated in the English manner with a single glance that they had never been introduced, and haughtily resumed his stare; then coughed and went away.

"What are they staring at?" Philip asked a boy.

"That's the Corner 'Ouse," answered the boy.

"But what are they staring at?"

"They're a-looking at *it*," the boy explained.

It dawned upon Philip's benighted intelligence that the crowd was staring at the Corner House, not in the expectation that it would fall down, or blow up, or give a display of fireworks, but merely because it was the Corner House and connected with a murder.

He elbowed himself into the mass with difficulty, to the accompaniment of anathemas, edging along by the fenced trench, where British workmen were still nonchalantly meandering through eternity. No policeman was in sight, except one on the steps of the Corner House itself. Having reached a point opposite the front door, Philip struck bravely across Strange Street. He had not achieved ten feet when someone spoke to him:

DOUBLOONS

“If you’re going into the house, I’ll stick behind you.”

It was a young man, slim and fair, dressed like a clerk, with a rather handsome face, quite spoilt by a terrible scar on the left cheek. What impressed Philip was the appealing and beautiful quality of the voice. He noticed that the man was extremely pale and breathing hard; the struggle to penetrate the crowd was proving too much for his strength. Philip guessed that he might have recently come out of a hospital.

“Right you are!” said Philip with cheerfulness.

In three minutes they had arrived at the policeman, who, after an explanation, let them in. The young man ran up-stairs without another word to Philip, and ignoring Mr. Hilgay, who stood in the door.

“Who is that?” Philip inquired of the landlord.

“His name is John Meredith,” Mr. Hilgay replied. “One of our boarders.”

“Doesn’t look very strong,” observed Philip.

“No, poor fellow!”

Philip also went up-stairs slowly, and arrived at the summit of the first flight. He traversed still more slowly the passages, first to the left, and then to the right, to his room. There were indications in the passage that house-painters were sooner or later to begin their beneficent if deliberate ministrations; broad planks lay about, together with cans and ladders; in fact, all the essentials were present except the house-painters themselves. He hesitated a moment, as it were in obedience to an instinctive impulse, before Mrs. Upottery’s door. It was unlatched, and he could hear a movement and a slight genteel cough. Then, ashamed of this impolite pause at a

DOUBLOONS

lady's portal, he passed into his own cubicle, shut himself in, and looked around. It was the first moment of daylight leisure that he had had in his room.

He opened the window, being a healthy Briton, and glanced out into Little Girdlers Alley. He noticed now that the window was newly fashioned in the wall. He perceived that the subdivision of the old large rooms of the house into cubicles had been attended by problems of lighting, and that in this instance the problem had been solved by making a new window, comparatively small and nearly square, on the casement principle, but with four large panes. He leaned forward his body, and scanned Mrs. Upottery's window, and he discerned that the partition between Mrs. Upottery's cubicle and the next further on, occurred exactly in the center of one of the old window spaces, cutting it in two. Here the architect had left the outer frame of the window while altering the arrangement of the panes. The architect had certainly been very ingenious, and Philip, examining the partition between his own room and Mrs. Upottery's, saw that it was of exceptional solidity, and probably justified Mr. Hilgay's proud epithet of sound-proof. He resumed his study of his window. Yes, a body might easily have been insinuated through it; the drop to the alley was thirteen or fourteen feet. There was no sign of wear and tear on the sill — no tell-tale smear of blood, no significant tuft of hair lodged in an interstice, no alluring scrap of blue cloth to match the dead captain's reefer jacket. In short, nothing on which to fasten suspicion! The innocence of that window and window-sill was most discouraging to an amateur detective, and Philip could only say to himself with an air of

DOUBLOONS

deductive logic: "The Captain was carried down the back stairs." Yet on the way to Strange Street, he had quite decided that the Captain had been put through the window.

Nearly facing his own, on the opposite side of the alley, was another window, a dirty and sinister window; and the distance between the two was not more than eight feet. Instantly his mind began to run on collusions and coöperations in crime, engineered by conspirators in different houses. Perhaps the clue to the mystery lay in the house on the opposite side of Little Girdlers Alley. He fixed his honest eyes on the sinister window, and indeed he could dimly perceive remarkable movements proceeding behind its vile glass — regular movements of a sweeping nature, and he stared with as much intensity as people were staring outside at the Corner House itself. The window seemed to conceal important and terrifying mysteries. Then he made out a long, white object that shifted to and fro, and was soon afterwards pained and shocked to discover in it nothing but a woman's arm. The woman was evidently brushing her hair.

The mysteries appeared to be evaporating. Nevertheless, he continued to gaze. And the movement stopped brusquely. A vague human form approached the window and opened it, and it proved to be that of a youngish woman with a hard and handsome face. She held a comb in one hand, and she leaned her elbows on her sill. She was not precisely dressed for church. She set about indicating to Philip by means of a stare compared to which his stare had been the timid, wavering glance of a child, that she resented his curiosity. She succeeded perfectly in conveying to him this idea. He reddened, retired,

DOUBLOONS

and shut his window. He withdrew from his window and sat down on the bed, but such was the clear and crystal purity of Mr. Hilgay's glass that the woman still held him with her relentless eyes. She had defeated him; she meant to rout him. He rose and pulled down the blind. Thus abruptly ended the first series of his investigations into the circumstances surrounding the Captain's death.

Dusk was already falling. His eye caught a card of "Regulations of the Corner House" hung behind the door, and in order to read it he turned the electric switch, but light did not flash responsively forth, because the hour for electricity was not yet. He struck a match, lit a cigarette, and utilized the last flickers of the match to read the regulations. There was one relating to dinner. "Boarders are respectfully informed that meals are served promptly in the dining-room. Breakfast, 8.30 A.M., 4d. Table-d'hôte lunch, 1 P.M., 8d. Table-d'hôte dinner, 6.30 P.M., 10d. Clients wishful to join the table-d'hotés should give notice at least one hour in advance. Otherwise an extra fee of twopence will be charged. Boarders are respectfully informed that the payment must be made at the time of giving such notice." The words "respectfully informed" occurred seventeen times on the card, proving that Mr. Hilgay's attitude toward his costumers was irreproachably correct.

Philip decided to dine in the house. With two hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket he was conscious of a powerful desire to postpone the real commencement of the reign of economy until the morrow, and to fare very well, just that night, at the Café Royal. But native force of character,

DOUBLOONS

aided by his wish to acquaint himself with the inmates of the house, enabled him to resist the horrid temptation. After all, life was earnest. Moreover, he had a career to carve, and instead of dwelling on the Captain's murder, which did not in the least concern him, he must devote himself to the process of carving. He descended to the office and ordered his dinner from Mr. Hilgay, who ticked off his name in one of the ledgers on the desk in the office, and gave him a little receipt for tenpence.

A gentleman with an adventurous nose and an appearance of prosperity and self-possession was in the office with Mr. Hilgay, and this individual turned at once to Philip

"Mr. Masters, I believe?"

"Yes," said Philip gruffly, objecting to the nose.

"I am the special commissioner of the *Evening Record*. We are making a special inquiry into this — er — affair. I had the pleasure of seeing you in court this morning, and —"

"So glad it pleased you," said Philip. "If I had only been in the dock no doubt your pleasure also would have been special."

The special commissioner laughed easily.

"I shall be very much obliged," he continued, "if you will give me a few moments."

"I will give you all the time there is," said Philip; "that is to say, twenty-four hours in every day. Take it every bit. I don't even ask to share it with you."

And he left the office and the special commissioner.

It is difficult to justify his behavior toward this representa-

DOUBLOONS

tive of an august profession. The fact was, however, that the *Evening Record* had printed a special column, in its best facetious style, on the ducal episode at the Jiu-Jitsu School, and Philip had not been enthusiastic about the tone of the references to himself.

He was just a little late for dinner, through having dropped off into a doze during the process of excogitating upon his future; he had not yet recovered all the sleep lost on the night of the murder. He descended to the front basement, where Mr. Adrian Hilgay's paying guests refreshed themselves in unchallengeable respectability, with a certain nervousness. In the first place, he had figured prominently at the inquest, and the talk would certainly bear upon the inquest; he might be questioned; he might even be regarded with suspicion. And in the second place, he was really rather too well dressed for such an assemblage. To eat a tenpenny dinner in a frock-coat that had cost five guineas only a couple of days before, seemed to border upon imperfect taste. But what was he to do? He could not be changing his suits all day. And if he had changed at all, at that hour, he might through sheer absent-mindedness have changed into evening dress, which would have been to create a sensation.

He found some thirty out of the sixty clients of Mr. Hilgay seated at their long tables in the refectory. Three boys were serving a brown stock soup; a few of the guests were absorbing the soup noiselessly, and many were not. The place and the people looked extremely mournful. Philip at once perceived that nothing can be more tragic than gentility divorced from riches. There were far more gentlemen than ladies,

DOUBLOONS

and far more age than youth; not one woman was young, or had been young recently, and Philip was decidedly the only man under forty. Clothes were somber, vague, either too loose or too tight; linen was like snow long fallen. Conversation scarcely existed, and such talk as struggled into being was stupid and banal. He had expected to be greeted by a buzz of chatter about the inquest, to hear a vivacious conflict of theories concerning the identity of the murderer. But nothing of the kind! Misfortune, disappointment, failure, and solitary life had made Mr. Hilgay's guests egotists of the most ferocious sort. They were wrapped up in themselves; nay, they were swathed in innumerable thicknesses of their wrongs and their exasperated desires and their foiled hopes. The murder of all the captains of the mercantile marine would scarcely have disturbed them from that fakir-like contemplation of themselves which is the characteristic of genteel and lonely poverty. They addressed themselves to their tenpenny meal with a singleness of purpose that was almost sublime. Philip had taken a place at the end of the table nearest the door; half a dozen empty covers separated him from his next neighbor, a man in a dark gray suit and a red necktie; not a soul showed more than a passing, faintly hostile interest in him. The two persons whom it might have amused him to contemplate — Mrs. Upottery and John Meredith, the young man with the scar and the pleasant voice — were not present. Doubtless Mrs. Upottery, after her exertions of the morning, had resumed her bed of sickness. Possibly John Meredith lacked tenpence. And, in brief, as Philip sat there, having imbibed the excellent soup, and awaiting the excellent New

DOUBLOONS

Zealand mutton, in that low-ceiled room, with its four cold electric lights, its bare furniture, its collection of forlorn but prim humanity, and its inhuman boys imitating in a perfunctory manner the waiters of a fashionable restaurant, a deep sadness took possession of his spirit. He wanted to run away and be joyous; he wanted to pretend that there was no such thing as ugly, undignified failure in the world. He swore that he would not stay in the Corner House another twenty-four hours. Indeed, he had a mind to move straight away, without even tasting the excellent New Zealand mutton, to the Savoy Hotel. With two hundred and fifty pounds he could have a hundred days of splendor at the Savoy.

Then Mr. Varcoe came into the refectory.

He was disguised as one of London's rejected, a consumptive man, with pale hands and a flushed face and stooping shoulders; his suitability for a philanthropic lodging-house seemed to be perfect; but Philip recognized him immediately by his gait and by his eyes. The recognition diverted Philip's thoughts, and he was inclined once more to remain in the Corner House for the mere sake of adventure. Mr. Varcoe strode uncertainly to the other end of the room, where a place happened to be vacant; he gave up the little receipt form and commenced his meal without a word, eating ravenously. Once his glance met the roving glance of Philip, and Philip raised ever so slightly his forehead, to indicate to Mr. Varcoe that his disguise had not been impenetrable. In return Mr. Varcoe ever so slightly raised his forehead, presumably to indicate to Philip that he relied on Philip's discretion.

DOUBLOONS

The detective's presence there could mean one thing only — that the detective suspected the murderer, or an accomplice of the murderer, to be among the guests of the house.

Philip gazed up at a notice on the wall to the effect that nothing but filtered water could be served at lunch and dinner, but that guests might themselves introduce beer into the house, provided the beer was bottled. And, as he gazed, the printed notice appeared to fade, and the portrait of Giralda to shine through it. The way in which that portrait haunted him, challenged him, distracted him, was highly disconcerting. It was curious how the vision of it made him dream, made him resent the existence of Sir Anthony Didring, and even of the Marquis of Standego. Was she dead? Would her wonderful corpse one day be discovered, to the horror of the town? Or did she live, somewhere, in some mystery withdrawn? He dealt absently with the New Zealand mutton, with the potatoes mashed, with the cabinet pudding, with the youthful Gruyère; it was a satisfying, if unoriginal, repast. He heard the voice of Varcoe now and then, emitting phrases in a key of careful platitude. And the next thing was that Varcoe rose and left. Varcoe, beginning last, had finished first. He drank half a glass of water and followed on Varcoe's heels. But when he arrived on the ground floor there was not a sign of Varcoe. Mr. Hilgay was eating neatly in his office. He did not care to question Mr. Hilgay about Varcoe. No doubt Varcoe was present in the house with the privity of Mr. Hilgay, and Philip felt therefore that he could not be too discreet. Besides, he had no right to invade the office of Mr. Hilgay, whose bearing toward himself, so friendly and

DOUBLOONS

grateful on the Tuesday night, had somewhat altered since the inquest.

He stood a moment at the front door. The crowd had dispersed. The workmen in the trench had gone. The trench showed its little warning lamps in Strange Street, and without doubt the watchman, Charlie, had resumed his nightly vigil in the cabin at the corner. Overhead the sky was beautifully clear, and the moon just rising. In a gloomy and wavering mood Philip climbed the stairs to get his hat and overcoat; the thirty diners were now straggling upwards in ones and twos.

He needed physical exercise, and in two minutes he was heading along Holborn for Oxford Street and the romantic distance of Bayswater. Never, he thought, had anything so depressed him as the excellent dinner offered by Mr. Hilgay to his boarders at the price of tenpence, or one shilling if not ordered in advance. He said to himself that he would have preferred to consume "two stone steps and a pint of thick" at a coffee stall. To-morrow his career must receive attention.

But he could not control his thoughts, not even though he bought a Bock cigar at the little tobacco shop on the north-east side of Oxford Circus, and began to smoke it in order to steady his nerves. He could not dismiss that puzzling and distracting portrait from before his eyes. He could not refrain from striving to penetrate into the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Giralda and the death of her father. He tried to think of a clue, only one little clue — and the quest seemed absurdly hopeless. Varcoe's efforts appeared to him equally ridiculous, for although Philip had the highest opinion

DOUBLOONS

of the London police as mirrors of courtesy, controllers of street traffic, and walking directories, he despised them as trackers of a criminal. He could imagine a detective in Paris or St. Petersburg performing miracles of craft; but London was too matter-of-fact, too blunt, too heavy-booted, too English for such inquisitorial work. Had he not, for example, instantly penetrated Varcoe's disguise? There were sixty persons in the lodging-house — would the police search the entire building? Impossible. The stranger seen by Mrs. Upottery in the Captain's room — how could the police hope to hit on that man? The boy who had given the false alarm to the watchman — how distinguish him from all the other boys in London? These persons had vanished. Giralda had vanished. The dead man's brother had vanished. The blood-marked stone had vanished. The Captain's papers had vanished. And to cap all there were the confusing and contradictory theories of the Russian Secret Society and the West Indian buried treasure: both of them wild, incredible, grotesque theories — just such red herrings as an old woman and a nigger, with honest, credulous, crude, unconscious foolishness, might be expected to draw across the true scent of the murderer.

He was still fretting in the maze of multitudinous and useless conjecture when, at the Marble Arch, an insistent hawker forced him to buy the second extra of the *Evening Record* at one penny, a hundred per cent above its face value. He glanced through it under a lamp-post. Nearly the whole of page three of the *Record* was given up to the inquest and to the brilliantly futile performances of the *Record's* special

DOUBLOONS

commissioner. The latter, getting back some of his own, stated briefly that "Mr. Philip Congleton Masters" (the *Record's* passion for leaving nothing out is to be noted in the full and accurate revelation of Philip's name), "whose connection with a recent episode at the Jiu-Jitsu School in Jermyn Street will be remembered, betrayed a strange disinclination to say anything whatever. Doubtless Mr. Philip Congleton Masters had reasons for this reticence which seemed sufficient to him." So much for Mr. Philip Congleton Masters!

The special commissioner had evidently also been disappointed by his reception at the widowed hands of Mrs. Upottery; but chivalry had prevented him from showing that disappointment so keenly.

Philip, feeling that after all a special commissioner is just as much as any other sentient being an illustration and proof of the great Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest, carefully folded up the paper and gave it to the hawker to sell again.

Instead of going straight on, he turned abruptly down through the nocturnal groves of Hyde Park, crossed St. George's Place, went along Bird Cage Walk, and so reached Westminster Bridge. After tarrying on the moonlit and lamplit Embankment, he walked as far as the Temple Station, and then mounted Arundel Street and came to Aldwych and Kingsway once more. The Metropolitan Theater and Pleasure House, with façade one glorious blue radiance of electricity, was disgorging its theatrical patrons; the music-hall moiety of its evening's activity was not yet finished. Three nights ago, penniless, Philip would have crept by unostentatiously

DOUBLOONS

on the other side of the road, but to-night, bulging bank-notes, he pushed with a certain careless deliberate arrogance through the well-clad throng. Every man except Philip seemed to be intent on getting himself and his womenfolk sent home like parcels, and the openers of cab-doors, official and unofficial, were participating in the prosperity of the Metropolitan and of the British Empire. Now among the corps of openers was a negro, and though all negroes have the air of being the same negro, Philip by minute investigation soon satisfied himself that this particular negro was identical with Massa Coco — not the Masso Coco of the inquest in broadcloth and manly tears, but a Massa Coco attired in effective tatters for the business of drawing tears from the eyes of wealthy and susceptible females at eleven fifteen of the night. Philip watched him in the pursuit of coin until the crowd had thinned to a trickle of unhurried persons, and he was just approaching to speak to him when, at the next entrance, the audience of the music-hall suddenly burst forth to take such cabs as the theatrical contingent had left. It was after half-past eleven when Coco, breathless and apparently satisfied, drew into the shadow of the wall to count his gains; and then Philip accosted him.

The negro appeared to take a huge delight in being noticed.

“Yes, sah; yes, sah!” he whined, “I know you, sah. My clothes, sah? Don’t ask me, sah. Because I’m a r’spectable nigger, and I don’t like to tell you. You seen my portrait in de paper, sah? Oh yes, sah, and my name underneaf it. I’s too sorry about dis murder, sah. I’s too sorry. Captain de only fren’ Massa Coco had!

DOUBLOONS

"Have the police been after you?" Philip asked.

"After *me*, sah? No, sah! I should be berry sharp wid any pleeceman dat come after me. I told de judge what I know. I answer de judge. I not answer ebbery 'pertinent pleeceman dat comes along. Good-night, sah!"

He walked away past the deserted and dark front of the theater, and then he came back.

"But I tell you, sah, because you a gentleman. I tell *you*. I saw de Captain's brother to-night. Yes, sah!"

"What! The man you saw at the hotel in Waterloo Road?"

"Yes, sah."

"You're sure?"

"I'se dam sure, sah!"

"Where?"

"In a cab, sah, just down dar." He pointed to St. Clement Dane's.

"What time?"

"'Bout seben o'clock, sah."

"Which way was he driving?"

"Up Kingsway, sah."

"Have you told the police?"

"Not me, sah! — what is de pleece to me? I'se too sorry for de Captain's death, but pleece most 'pertinent."

And he ran off in the direction of the Strand.

"Here!" Philip said; but Massa Coco took no heed.

The shock of this information, even though he did not unconditionally accept it as fact, produced a turmoil in Philip's mind which had a curious effect. For he suddenly thought of a trifling incident which he had utterly forgotten, and the

DOUBLOONS

incident now assumed, for some inexplicable reason, a strange and formidable importance, namely, the swift raising and dropping of a blind in a window of the Corner House at the moment when he was speaking to the ganger on the morning of the discovery of the corpse. Here, he reflected, was conceivably a clue.

He hurried up to Strange Street. He felt sure that the window was the first-floor window nearest the corner of Strange Street and Little Girdlers Alley, and a moment's inspection of the house served to confirm his memory. That window was now illuminated. He went meditatively up-stairs, and as he reached the corridor a clock struck twelve, and all the lights except that in the hall were extinguished. He stopped in the darkness at the corner of the two corridors on the first floor, and drew from his pocket a small electric lamp which he usually carried. By accident, he dropped it, and in groping for it, he displaced one of the house-painter's planks, and made a considerable noise. But he found the lamp, and pressing its button, he gazed at the door of the room in which the blind had been so suspiciously lifted and dropped. There was not a sound in the great house. Then a board cracked, and then the door of the room opened, brusquely, and a man appeared. It was John Meredith, with the scar.

END OF VARCOE'S INQUIRY

PHILIP and Meredith stood regarding each other rather stupidly, as people will who are mutually astonished. The passages were dark, save for Philip's little electric lamp, but in Meredith's room a candle was burning, and the figure of the young man as he blocked the doorway was silhouetted against this faint and flickering light. A sense of the mystery of this sleeping house, with its five floors of misfortune, and its simple Adrian Hilgay keeping vigil at the base, impressed Philip very strongly. He felt more than usually alive, more than usually interested in the life of the moment, to the exclusion both of the past and of the future. At the end of a few seconds, he lifted his lamp and threw its thin ray on Meredith's face. The scarred and yet handsome features were agitated.

"What is wrong?" Meredith stammered in a low tone.

"Nothing," said Philip. "I was just going to my room, and I dropped my lamp and stumbled over one of these planks."

"Oh! I thought something was wrong."

Again the appealing sympathetic quality of Meredith's voice affected Philip in a remarkable way. It filled him with an incomprehensible desire to protect Meredith, to take care

DOUBLOONS

of Meredith, to shield him in the rough-and-tumble of existence; as though Meredith were incapable of looking after himself. Yet Meredith's was not a foolish nor a weak face, and despite his agitation he twirled his mustache with the left hand in the manner not to be described as other than uncompromisingly independent.

"What *is* wrong?" Philip demanded, with that disconcerting directness which characterized him in his more strenuous instants.

Meredith bit his lip, hesitating.

"Why did you stop at my door?" he parried sternly.

"To take my lamp out of my pocket."

"And why did you want to take your lamp out of your pocket at my door?"

Philip smiled at last. He thought that Meredith's tragic imitation of a cross-examining counsel was comic enough to excuse a smile. And he answered Meredith with the air of humoring him.

"Because the lights happened to be turned out just as I got to the top of the stairs."

"Oh!" murmured Meredith vaguely.

Then Philip had the sudden impulse to adopt the offensive.

"But in any case," he added, "I should have stopped at this door."

"Why?"

"Because I had a curiosity about this room. It is now satisfied."

"What curiosity?"

DOUBLOONS

"I wanted to know who occupied it. The idea took me, about a quarter of an hour ago, to find out who occupied it."

"Why?"

Philip gazed at him mildly.

"Shall I tell you? Yes. I'll tell you, but not here. We can't stand talking like this. I'll tell you to-morrow morning."

"No, no," whispered Meredith with quick impatience and a marked increase of agitation. "You must tell me now. Come in here. Come in at once."

Philip accepted the invitation, and Meredith noiselessly shut the door. The first thing that struck Philip was the extreme tidiness of the room; it was a model and example for all lodgers. The second thing that struck him was Meredith's intense seriousness. "I wonder if this young man has any sense of humor," Philip mused. For the situation presented itself now to him as merely humorous. He was convinced that the raising and dropping of the blind bore no relation whatever to the murder; his suppositions and conjectures seemed purely fanciful as he stood face to face with John Meredith in the tiny chamber. He did not doubt that Meredith was a strange and perhaps a hysterical creature, whose peculiar physical charm had provided him with a too romantic past (what, indeed, meant the scar?), and that he had good reason for being agitated when footsteps stopped outside his door at dead of night.

"I'm so sorry I disturbed you," Philip said kindly. "I'm afraid you'll think me rather — how shall I put it? — free and easy — rather cavalier. I —"

"I wish you would tell me why you were so curious about

DOUBLOONS

my room," Meredith interjected in a tense, rather louder voice. He remained standing himself, and he did not ask Philip to sit. As a fact, there was only one chair.

"The truth is," said Philip, "I oughtn't to have made that remark, but as I did make it, I suppose I must explain."

"I think so," Meredith observed.

"Only I warn you, it's ridiculous," Philip continued.

Then he explained to Meredith how he had been struck by the sudden suspicious movement of the blind just before the discovery of the corpse. "I said to myself, in a purely irresponsible way, that perhaps the person who lifted that blind had some connection with the murder. But it was just a wild notion that flashed through my head, and I'm really awfully sorry I disturbed you. The thing has only to be stated in plain terms to prove its own ridiculousness."

His tone expressed unmistakably the sympathy with which John Meredith had inspired him.

"And you say this was on the Wednesday morning?" Meredith queried.

"Yes."

"What time?"

"Oh! I don't know. Between seven and eight. Anyhow it was immediately before I left the street, and the Captain's body was found immediately after I left the street. Yes, it must have been between seven and eight."

"You're sure it was the window of this room?"

"Absolutely."

"Excuse me," Meredith said faintly, and he sat down on the sole chair.

DOUBLOONS

"What's the matter? You aren't ill?" Philip cried.

"No, I'm not at all ill. But I want to sit down. I shall be all right in a moment."

"You're very pale."

Meredith straightened himself. "Perhaps you'd be pale, Mr. Masters — you are Mr. Masters, aren't you? — if you knew what I know."

"What do you know?"

"I know that I never did raise my blind on Wednesday morning. I had slept very badly for one or two nights, but on Tuesday night I slept like a log. I didn't wake up at all till nearly eleven o'clock."

"Then, after all, I must be mistaken in the room."

"That's just what I don't think you are," said Meredith with returning calm and an almost frigid emphasis.

Philip paused.

"That means," said he, "that you think someone came into your room that morning early, without going through the formality of wakening you?"

"Yes," Meredith nodded.

"Someone connected with the murder, if not the murderer?"

"Yes."

"But don't you lock your door at nights?"

"Certainly," said Meredith, "and I put the key under my pillow."

"What a strange thing for a fellow to do!" was Philip's private comment. And aloud he said: "Then the person who came in must have had a key that fits your door?"

DOUBLOONS

"He must."

"And he must have secured that beforehand, so that his coming into your room must have been part of his plans?"

Meredith gave a sign of assent.

"But why *your* room?" Philip demanded curtly.

"I — I can't imagine."

"He wouldn't have taken the trouble to get a key for your door for the sake of looking out through your window into the street. Any window on the front would have done for that, or he could have gone to the dining-room. Why *your* room?"

"I — I can't imagine," Meredith repeated nervously.

"May I ask why you think I am not mistaken in the window?"

"I seem to remember having a sort of dream that someone came into my room and went out again. I got up with that impression. I had it most strongly."

"When did you first hear of the murder?"

"Just as I was leaving my room. One of the boys was cleaning the corridor — he told me — fortunately."

"May I ask why you say 'fortunately'?"

"Well, it was a great shock to me, of course," Meredith answered quietly — "a very great shock."

"You didn't faint or anything?"

"Why do you suggest such a thing?"

"Simply because you don't look strong. No other reason." He glanced with intention at the scar. "After an accident," he said, "one is often —"

"Yes, yes," Meredith cut him short. "It's quite true, I'm

DOUBLOONS

not very strong. But I didn't faint, I assure you." He smiled and blushed momentarily.

Philip would have liked to hear some explanation of the scar, but none was offered. The conversation halted.

"You're particularly interested in this murder?" Philip ventured.

Meredith paused. "Yes, I am," he said.

"So am I!" Philip remarked, and he endeavored to charge his tone with meaning. "So am I! And as you're interested —"

"Well, the Captain being in the house, and so on —"

"Exactly! And as you're interested, I'll give you a piece of news. By the way, you've read the accounts of the inquest? I didn't see you there."

"Yes, I've read them."

"Well, that mysterious brother of the Captain's — he's not dead, at any rate. He's been seen to-night."

Meredith's head fell back slightly, and there was a catch in his breath. Then he jumped up from the chair. "Really!" he muttered with an affectation of lightness. "Really!" At the same time he approached the door. It was a sign that Philip could not ignore, and he departed, saying to himself that if Meredith had not dismissed him from sheer inability any longer to control his hysterical emotions, then Philip's name was not what it was. Why, the poor fellow had scarcely been able to murmur a good-night!

At that moment Philip, in spite of adverse appearances, was entirely convinced that John Meredith had had nothing to do with the murder of Captain Pollexfen. But on the other

DOUBLOONS

hand the adverse appearances could not be passed over, and they preached loudly that Meredith knew more than he would tell. Even a policeman could not have been deceived by that agitated pretense of perfect ignorance, by that assumption of a mere stranger's interest in the crime. That Meredith had lately experienced moral sufferings of no usual kind was written on his winning, wistful face. Perhaps here was one reason why Philip so frankly sympathized with him. Philip felt that he could make a friend of Meredith, and it was not often that men instantly affected his heart in such wise. And as he stood there hesitant in the dark passage, with the dreaming house of fallen gentility above him and below him, and the tiny electric lamp throwing a yellow shaft of light into the gloom, it was less the general problem of the murder than the special problem of John Meredith that attracted and absorbed him. Why should a mysterious unknown penetrate secretly into Meredith's room on the morning after the murder, lift and drop the blind, and then depart, having apparently disturbed nothing and stolen nothing? And that heavy sleep of Meredith's — did it not point to a drug?

He passed to his own room, and was startled to find the door unlatched. A greater surprise awaited him when he entered the cubicle; for Mr. Varcoe was in possession of it. Mr. Varcoe also had an electric lamp, but a much smaller one, and much more powerful than Philip's. It was attached to his watch-chain, or rather to a chain that pretended to be a watch-chain. The rays of the two lamps met and crossed, as it were in an encounter. Mr. Varcoe appeared to be in a state of high self-satisfaction, and he made no effort to conceal

DOUBLOONS

the fact. Nor did he offer either apology or explanation to Philip for the trespass that he was committing.

"To begin with," said Philip, with no preliminary, "we will draw the curtain." He drew the little curtain across the window. "And we will shut the door." He shut the door. "And now, Mr. Varcoe, may I respectfully inquire what the devil you are doing in my room?"

He was not angry, but it amused him to assume anger.

"Oh, that's all right," said Varcoe. "I was only waiting."

"The deuce you were!" Philip replied. "What for? A thrashing?"

And he approached Varcoe with a gesture that indicated grievous bodily harm. He was taller than Varcoe, who had not the look of an athlete.

"Be careful, sir," said Varcoe. "I have my revolver."

"I don't care a bilberry for your revolver," Philip replied, putting his lamp on to the table. "Drop it."

Varcoe had rapidly produced a revolver from his pocket; he held it in his right hand.

"Drop it!" Philip smiled. "Drop it on the bed!"

He seized Varcoe's left hand in both his hands, and operated the renowned Jiu-Jitsu twist in contrary directions of the index and the thumb. By leaving his left hand unclasped, an open prey to such an attack, Varcoe proved that, whatever his skill as a detective, he was not a finished expert in self-defense. He gave a smothered scream of pain as Philip forced him to bend over the bed, and then the fingers of the right hand relaxed and the revolver fell noiselessly on the artistic counterpane.

DOUBLOONS

"There you are!" Philip laughed. "Quite neat, you see! You perceive the theory of the thing, don't you? While that stroke is being practised on one hand it is impossible for the other hand even to hold anything."

"But that's no joke!" Varcoe complained.

"Yes it is," said Philip. "I assure you I meant it as a joke." He picked up the weapon. "I thought you might be interested in the theory. Besides, you oughtn't to threaten people with a revolver. It's not quite polite. And on the part of a trespasser it amounts almost to bad form. Sit down. My joke has made you perspire, eh? No, sit down on the bed. You'll be more comfortable there! I'll have the chair. Now, won't you tell me what you were waiting for?"

Varcoe, who was not a fool, accepted the situation with an admirable tranquillity.

"I was waiting for you," he said, still shaking the poor left hand.

"You wanted to see me?"

"No, not specially. But about five minutes ago circumstances compelled me to seek refuge somewhere, and I sought refuge here. I knocked first, and as you didn't answer, I opened the door and came in. I thought I might rely on your benevolent neutrality."

"In regard to what?"

"In regard to what I am doing."

"My first notion naturally was that you were searching my room. I imagined you had some suspicions of me. It was that that put me in such a jocular mood."

"Not at all," Mr. Varcoe replied. "I assure you."

DOUBLOONS

"Then I can understand that you did not find my joke in quite the best taste," said Philip. "But what *were* you doing?"

"I was pursuing my investigations. You saw me at dinner?"

"Did I see you at dinner? I should say I did see you at dinner! My dear sir, your disguise would not have deceived a camel."

"I am aware of it," said Varcoe. "It was especially contrived not to deceive anybody who knew me too well. You may be astonished to learn that there are no less than five notorious criminals staying in this house at the present moment. At least, there were five this afternoon. There are only four now. One decamped immediately after dinner, but as I had men waiting outside in case of urgency, he did not decamp very far. You see the class of person attracted by the Hilgay brand of philanthropy."

"Had this deserter anything to do with the murder?"

"Not at all. But he was wanted for stealing fireplaces out of a row of new houses in Wandsworth. So that was all right."

Philip began to conceive a certain respect for Mr. Varcoe, and a certain interest in his methods.

"But why the bad disguise?" he questioned.

"Merely to enable me to study the faces of those who saw through it," replied Varcoe.

"How did my face strike you?" Philip demanded.

"It didn't strike me," said Varcoe. "Because I had already made up my mind about you. You must remember that there was the policeman who came up to you while you were in the cabin that night. He said to you: 'What's up?' Don't you

DOUBLOONS

recollect? He had had you in sight for two hours or so. So you couldn't very well have assisted at the burial. Your previous movements are accounted for."

"I remember perfectly," said Philip. "And I have wondered why you didn't bring forward that policeman at the inquest! Some slight suspicion undoubtedly attached to me, and that policeman would have cleared me, as you say."

"We didn't bring him forward because it wouldn't have paid us to," said Varcoe.

"Wouldn't have paid you to?"

"No. He didn't show any remarkable common-sense. In fact, he has had a reprimand. So why should we give the force away? It isn't our business to clear suspected persons. It's our business to convict suspected persons."

"You're frank," Philip murmured, made thoughtful by this strictly professional view of the functions of the police.

"Of course I am," said Varcoe. "I'm paying you a compliment. You're the kind of man that appeals to me. You ought to have been in the C.I.D."

"You flatter me," Philip smiled. "I'll give you some lessons in Jiu-Jitsu if you like. But won't you go on being frank, and tell me what success you have had in this house so far? I am rather keen to know, and I fancy I can add to your information, whatever you've found out."

"You'll oblige me infinitely by adding to it," said Varcoe, and continued quickly, "if you can."

"Well," so Philip responded, "that brother of Pollexfen has been seen."

DOUBLOONS

"Who told you?"

Philip explained.

"I know all about the mysterious brother," Varcoe said, with that affectation of calmness which even the greatest men cannot always avoid in a moment of triumph.

"You do?"

"Yes. I've even had a chat with"—Varcoe seemed to stumble for a word—"with him."

"To-night?"

"To-night."

"Well?"

"And I've drunk champagne with Miss Josephine Fire in the dressing-room that used to be Miss Giralda's. And I've found the boy that was employed to send the watchman off on that wild-goose chase."

"Mr. Varcoe, I congratulate you."

"And that isn't all I've done."

"In short the game is up?"

"The game is up. If it wasn't, do you suppose, my dear Mr. Masters, that I should be unpacking my heart with words to you in this fashion, as the Swan of Avon says?"

"You've got your hands on the criminal?"

Varcoe nodded proudly.

"Who is it?"

"Guess."

"I'm not good at guessing," said Philip; "but I'll guess if you say whether I'm right."

"Go ahead," was Varcoe's reply.

"Well, I won't guess the foreign-looking person that Mrs.

DOUBLOONS

Upottery saw in the Captain's room — in *this* room — on Tuesday night."

"Why not?"

"Because that's too obvious. Besides, you haven't established *his* identity. I bet."

"Yes I have," Varcoe contradicted.

"Who was he?"

"You do well to put it in the past tense," said Varcoe with a strange intonation. "That gentleman no longer exists."

"He is dead?"

"He has been destroyed, simply destroyed."

Philip controlled an involuntary shiver of the spine.

"But it wasn't he," Varcoe added dryly.

"Coco?" Philip ventured.

"My dear sir, what an idea! Negroes are addicted to murder, but they never practise the least finesse. Probably because they do not read De Quincey. No, emphatically not Coco! You might as well have guessed Mr. Hilgay, or the coroner, or Josephine."

Philip paused a moment, and then said, self-consciously:

"Had John Meredith, the young man in the corner room on this floor, anything to do with it?"

Mr. Varcoe was visibly impressed.

"Didn't I tell you you ought to be in the C.I.D.?" he smiled; and then he looked at his watch, holding the dial in the ray of the lamp.

"You don't mean to say it's Meredith?" Philip exclaimed, jumping up from his chair, and even as he spoke his thought wonderingly ran: "Why should I be moved in this way?"

DOUBLOONS

"I have not said it was Meredith," the detective answered.

"Am I right, or am I wrong?" demanded Philip, half offended.

At the same moment could be heard the faintest ting of a bell, but whether it was outside the house, or in the passage, or in some cubicle, Philip could not be sure.

"In half an hour from now you will know," replied Varcoe, and, assuming an entirely different tone, serious, official, and commanding, he added: "Please stay here in your room, Mr. Masters. It is important that we should not be disturbed. I rely on you."

With these words he went silently and softly out of the cubicle, shutting the door. Philip noticed that he was wearing felt slippers.

During the night the Corner House experienced one crowded hour of glorious life.

Philip waited some time; he had no watch, not having yet repaired the loss caused by a slight *contretemps* which may arrive to any person who has been within sight of his last sixpence; but he judged that he must have waited considerably more than the half hour mentioned by Mr. Varcoe. He had heard distantly a variety of trifling and heterogeneous sounds. Then he crept to the door and turned the handle. The handle was docile enough; the door, however, would not open; it had been secured on the outside.

For an instant he was furious, but for an instant only. His conscience told him that, being an Englishman, he was a sportsman, and being a sportsman he must play the game,

DOUBLOONS

even if Mr. Varcoe did not. Assuming that the detective had a *coup* to make, as undoubtedly he had, it would not be fair to do anything which might mar his chances. Moreover, Philip was not sure whether, in fastening him in, the detective *had* transgressed the rules of the game. It was arguable that the detective had a moral right to turn keys in his own favor. So Philip resigned himself to wait longer. His was something of the fatalism of a child. He lay down on the bed, and quite unintentionally slept.

He was awakened by what in Russia is called a domiciliary visit. A force of police, under the pained guidance of Mr. Hilgay, was searching the entire house, cubicle by cubicle, and floor by floor. It appeared that Mr. Varcoe had posted plain-clothes men in the street, with instructions to enter when summoned, and to enter without a summons if no summons had been received before a given hour. The limit having expired, they had violently entered, to the dismay and shocked resentment of the bland Adrian. But Mr. Varcoe had vanished. He had apparently vanished off the face of the earth. For his minions made sure that he was not in the house, and they were absolutely convinced that he had not left the house. Nor was he on the roof, nor clinging to spouts. Scenes of uncontrolled recrimination passed between gentility and the law in the corridors. Nearly all the guests threatened to leave on the instant the house where they had been subjected to such gross and unprecedented insult. But none left; the prices were so low. Day dawned on a sleepless community of souls.

XI

IN THE FOURTH ESTATE

THE next day was Saturday, a day usually rather flat and uninteresting, as regards its morning, in Central London, and rather vivacious, as regards its afternoon, even in the primmest suburbs. But that particular Saturday morning was not anywhere destined to dullness. Clerks who strolled across bridges and out of termini with the sole intention of drawing a week's salary and going home again, were met by the posters of a special second edition of the *Daily Courier*, which contained an artistically breathless description of the night at the Corner House. No other morning paper had "got" the most startling episode in the annals of modern crime, an episode which the *Courier* poster announced thus: "Corner House Mystery. Scotland Yard defied. Detective Varcoe spirited away. Is he dead?" The evening papers had not yet had time to come out, so that the *Courier* held a monopoly for quite two hours. And in spite of the fact that the *Courier* had just recently changed hands, tone, and politics, and was therefore bound, morally or immorally, to stir London up at the earliest possible instant, experienced Londoners felt that here was something genuine in the way of a sensation. The voices of the newsboys as they cried the *Courier* had that "take-it-or-leave-it"

DOUBLOONS

accent which, on the lips of a newsboy, always indicates that there is no deception. The Giralda affair had been great before; it was now unique. It was the one thing that existed in London; it extinguished sport, politics, the weather, and the accommodation question on the District Railway; even bridge was played less than usual that day.

In the Corner House life had become very difficult indeed. Not later than nine o'clock the siege of the vicinity had already been resumed by the vast leisured class that exclusively occupies the main thoroughfares of the town. The crowds were kept at bay on the confines of Strange Street by a force of policemen, but policemen could not be set to keep policemen out of the house; nor is the modern journalist, especially when he is attached to a Sunday paper and it happens to be Saturday morning, the sort of person that can be kept out of any house by any authority, natural or supernatural, should he desire to enter it. The modern journalist, at a salary of fifty shillings a week and cab-fares, knows the power behind him. And what with police in and out of uniform, and journalists, week-day and Sunday, and the general leisured public surging and staring at the ends of the street, the Corner House had the right to call itself fully and strictly invested. Chief and yet most mysterious among the strangers within its gates was a being from Scotland Yard greater than Varcoe; a personage, indeed, than which Scotland Yard could produce none higher: the king of his kind. Policemen did not refer to him by name; they said *'e* or *'im*, in an impressed whisper, with jerks of the head in the direction of the particular room where this formidable being was supposed

DOUBLOONS

to be. Few people saw him; he was simply known to be "on the job." And that he was on the job, that he had deigned to quit his lair in order to come to the job, rendered the job sublime in the eyes of those who could differentiate between jobs. He interviewed Philip; and Philip's leading impression of him was that he made a very good listener. He also interviewed Mr. Hilgay. Shortly after this experience, Mr. Hilgay took to his bed and sent for a doctor. The situation had become too vast and complicated for Mr. Hilgay; therefore he retired, defeated if not disgraced, expecting brain fever.

Philip, after what was called breakfast but what that morning had been little more than a picnic, remained with several other boarders in the basement refectory, and employed his time steadily in refusing to talk either to journalists or to his fellow-lodgers. He wanted to do sundry things that he could not do: to find a situation — he could not even fix his mind on this important matter; to have an exhaustive conversation with John Meredith — John Meredith was not on view; or, in default, to chat with Sir Anthony — he would have difficulty in getting out of the street. It puzzled him how the journalists went to and fro. No one, unless it might have been the criminal himself, was more interested in the Corner House crimes than Philip, at that moment. He seemed to have stepped right into the middle of them; they absorbed him like a bog. They certainly prevented him from even beginning to carve his career.

A gray-mustached commissionaire, in the sober uniform of his corps, entered the refectory.

"Mr. Masters?" He looked round inquiringly.

DOUBLOONS

"Well?" Philip curtly replied.

The commissioner handed a visiting-card to Philip, and the card bore the legend: "Lord Nasing."

"His lordship would like to have the pleasure of an interview with you, sir."

The genteel lodgers pricked up their ears.

"Who is Lord Nasing?" Philip demanded.

"He is — er — Lord Nasing," the commissioner explained. "His lordship told me to say that he thought he could be useful to you."

"Where is he?"

"At his office."

"Where's that?"

"In Stewart Square. I have a cab waiting, sir."

"And can we get out?"

"Yes, sir. Up Little Girdlers Alley, and through the yard of the 'Cup and Ball.'"

Philip saw no reason why he should decline the adventure. It offered him at least an escape from inaction.

"I will come with you," he said.

He felt sure that Lord Nasing was famous for something or other, but he could not recollect what; and he did not care to ask the commissioner. His ignorance of the latest creations in peerages was deplorable.

Arrived in Stewart Square, that humming center of journalism between Fleet Street and the Embankment, the cab stopped in front of the glassy and monumental Brent Building, where three dailies, twenty-nine weeklies, and three monthlies had their home. Of the four great journalistic houses in Lon-

DOUBLOONS

don, the Brent Company was not the least important. It was a one-man company. Nicholas Brent, its founder, had been the only son of his father, and he had never taken a partner nor a wife. It showed annual profits of over a quarter of a million, and its dividend increased each year. Its three lower stories were faced with glass, so that all the world might see the operations that went forward within. On the ground floor were the Victory printing machines, which were even then throwing off copies of the first edition (nominally the second) of the *Evening Record* at the rate of a hundred-and-twenty thousand copies an hour. On the first floor were the compositors, engaged at linotype machines in setting-up the flying and influential words of the descriptive reporters and paragraph writers on the second floor. These stories were occupied and busy day and night — a symbol and sign of the ceaseless activity of the Brent brain, that sardonic brain which had invented the celebrated newspaper maxim: "We spin you a yarn to-day. We give you the news next week."

The commissionaire, with the courage of an old soldier, plunged himself and Philip straight into the seething heart of the Brent daily battle, and did not leave his charge until, after a lift and a long corridor, he had deposited him at a door marked "Mr. Brent," with the name crossed out and "Lord Nasing" written over it. Philip remembered then who Lord Nasing was. The commissionaire had knocked and received a favorable answer, and Philip entered.

The interior was vast and noble, the caprice of a millionaire who spent the whole of his waking hours in the successful pursuit of pleasure by means of business, and who believed

DOUBLOONS

in comfort with splendor. His office was an exact reproduction of Napoleon's Council Chamber at Fontainebleau, with its ceiling by Boucher, its Beauvais tapestries, and even the famous round table whose top is a single piece of mahogany.

At the round table, which was covered with letters and slip-proofs, sat a pale, puffy man of forty-five with the ear-pieces of a telephone strapped round his dark head. Two young women were writing in remote corners of the room.

"No," the man was saying with careful distinctness into the telephone, "Giralda. G as in gin, I, R as in roller, A, L, D as in donkey, A. Got it? Good!" He looked up. "Mr. Masters? Will you sit down a moment? I'm just 'phoning to Paris."

He finished what was apparently part of a paragraph for the Paris edition of the *Record* and then he rang off, released himself from the ear-pieces, and turned to Philip. A messenger had come and gone. The two women silently departed.

"Good-morning, Mr. Masters. Won't you have this chair near the table?"

"Thanks," said Philip. "Are you Lord Nasing?"

"I am. You know I've just bought the *Daily Courier*?"

"I did not," said Philip.

"And yet I have spent twenty thousand in advertising the fact. It just shows that one can never advertise enough. Well, I've bought the *Courier*, and henceforth it's produced in this building. You are after a situation, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Philip.

DOUBLOONS

"How would you like to come on the staff?" The tones were even, placid, cold.

"But I'm not a journalist."

"That's all the better. I want new blood. Journalists always think in grooves."

"I can't write."

"That's not necessary," said Lord Nasing, "I can't, either. And look at me! I can hire writers for a couple of pounds a week."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go round and get stuff for the *Courier*."

"What sort of stuff?"

"Bright stuff. Interesting stuff. Exclusive stuff."

"And why do you pick out me?"

"For various reasons. Chiefly because Evenwood, the special of the *Record*, has been able to make nothing of you. His description of you, and — er — what we know. In short —"

"And the screw?" Philip demanded, smiling.

"What do you ask?"

Philip, having been thus requested to open his mouth, decided that he ought to open it extremely wide.

"Twenty pounds a week," he said, calmly, drumming on the table.

Lord Nasing paused.

"I will give it you. But you know the rule of the house?"

"No," said Philip.

"No notice given or required. I have over four hundred staff contributors and secretaries in this place. Everyone can

DOUBLOONS

walk out when he pleases, and I can shoot 'em out when I please. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Perfectly," said Philip. "Life must be quite interesting here."

Lord Nasing laughed.

"It is," he said shortly.

"Of course I understand your motives," Philip remarked.

"My motives?" Lord Nasing repeated, with a gesture almost threatening.

"Yes," said Philip, "you're going to tell me to work up the Corner House affair. Now, it seems to me that, next to the murderer, I know more about it than anybody in London. I'm in it. I'm of it. I've refused to talk to reporters, and the *Record* is cross with me for my silence. I'm worth money in Fleet Street. What you can't get in one way you usually get in another. That's why you succeed, Lord Nasing. You think you've got the most valuable journalistic asset in London for a paltry twenty pounds a week."

"And haven't I?"

"Yes," said Philip. "Provided you give me a month's engagement certain."

"Impossible, Mr. Masters. I cannot break the rule of a lifetime."

"As you please," Philip rejoined. "But suppose the mystery was cleared up to-morrow, I reckon I should be 'shot out' to-morrow. And it's not good enough."

Lord Nasing rose.

"I admire you," said he.

"The admiration is mutual," said Philip. "Good-morning, my lord."

DOUBLOONS

"Not at all," said Lord Nasing, "I yield, young man, I yield. But you will sign your articles."

"I will sign everything I write," Philip agreed. "You want me to begin right off, I imagine?"

"Certainly, I shall expect you here to-night at seven o'clock with results, including naturally your own story in full. If necessary, I mean to issue a special edition of the *Courier* to-morrow. Tell me, what do you think is the real explanation of this mess that Scotland Yard has got itself into?" Lord Nasing sat down again.

"To my mind," said Philip, "the explanation is perfectly simple. The late Varcoe —"

"You think he's dead?"

"I do. The late Varcoe fancied himself too much. He fancied he was going to do the trick all alone, and he very nearly did; but not quite. Somebody else was just a shade cleverer than he was, and that somebody is the criminal. Now Varcoe had discovered the criminal. He told me so. I am pretty sure that he had discovered everything. But he confided in nobody. That was his mistake. Nobody at Scotland Yard was to have a ha'porth of credit but Varcoe. And so, in getting rid of Varcoe, the criminal was just as safe as he was before Varcoe started his inquiries. I suppose there's jealousy at Scotland Yard, as there is everywhere. But they'll never admit it."

"Excellent! Excellent!" murmured Lord Nasing. "You go and write that theory up. . . . But, look here, if Varcoe is dead, where is his corpse?"

"I expect it's in the Corner House."

DOUBLOONS

"Do you think you can find it?"

"Who knows?" said Philip. "Hadn't I better be going?"

"Yes," agreed Lord Nasing.

"What about expenses?"

"*Carte blanche*," said his lordship.

"I assume when you say *carte blanche* you mean —"

"*Carte blanche*," his lordship repeated.

"Right," said Philip, getting up. "Well, in addition to *carte blanche* with the cashier, I shall want a — a tame grammarian and a photographer."

"You mean to take photographs?"

"I mean to show you what my notion of journalism is," said Philip.

He departed, with his scrip and his staff (consisting of the photographer and a youth who could write), very joyous in his new profession, and withal gloomy as a man. The thought of Varcoe dead touched his heart; a nameless apprehension concerning John Meredith affrighted him; and the portrait of Giralda was always before his eyes like a lure.

It seemed to him, however, that he had sharpened the knife by which he should recommence the carving of his career.

XII

THE BANK-NOTES

THE police, even aided by the monarch of Scotland Yard, made no useful discovery that day. They had no point from which to begin. If Mr. Varcoe had only given the least and vaguest hint to his assistants, the inquiry perhaps might have been more successful. He had chosen otherwise, however, and he was now paying, if he had not already paid, the penalty of vainglorious pride. As for the journalists, they did no better than the police; but then they were hampered by the police, whereas the police were not hampered by them. Philip, as the newly-appointed representative of the *Courier*, moved with his satellites regally up and down the house. He had conceived a preliminary and extremely comprehensive plan, and he began at once to carry it out, though he did not hope for immediate results; he had forty hours before the next ordinary edition of the paper went to press, and if any unusual luck happened to him within twenty hours, there would still be time for the special Sunday edition suggested by Lord Nasing. His photographer and his tame grammarian, who was also a stenographer, he regarded as two beautiful new toys.

In the execution of his plan, he knocked at John Meredith's door. The hour was noon.

DOUBLOONS

"Who's there?" cried the wonderful voice of Meredith, and Philip noticed in it a tone of almost excessive alarm.

"It's Masters," Philip replied. "I want to have a talk with you, if you can spare the time."

No reply came, and Philip knocked again.

"Did you hear?" he questioned.

"I — I can't talk just now," Meredith replied, and Philip seemed to detect tears in the voice.

"Shall you be in for lunch, may I ask?"

Another pause, and then an agitated response:

"I don't think so. I may be."

Philip walked to the head of the stairs, undecided what to do. He had set his mind on an interview with John Meredith, not necessarily for reproduction in the *Courier*, but for his own enlightenment. The young man's singular demeanor on the previous night, at mention of Captain Pollexfen's brother, had remained in Philip's mind with special clearness. And the matter of the blind presented features of the most extraordinary interest. Moreover, he still felt strongly that Meredith was in need of assistance, and he wished to render that assistance.

As he stood in the shadow at the head of the stairs, he heard a door very cautiously opened, and then a soft, rapid step along the corridor. Meredith appeared, in hat and overcoat, and Meredith had evidently not expected to find Philip in the path. He gave Philip one furtive look of pathetic dismay, hesitated, and then rushed past him down the stairs without a word.

Philip, dumfounded, descended after him to the street.

DOUBLOONS

Meredith had hastened out, turned to the right, and up the alley, half-running. At a discreet distance he was followed by a man who detached himself from the staring crowd without hindrance from the police, and whom Philip knew for a detective.

Difficulties with his private photographer afforded some distraction to Philip's mind. Meredith did not come to lunch. But Mrs. Upottery, to the surprise of all the world, did come to lunch. She was in profound mourning, as at the inquest, and she ate a satisfactory meal with infinite gravity, refusing, however, the tapioca pudding — perhaps on account of its flippancy. She spoke to none of the remnant of people at the tables, and none dared to address her. She was sterner here even than at the inquest, and men marveled anew that such frigid and antique charms had bewitched Captain Pollexfen, who was a sailor, and probably, therefore, a connoisseur in charms of countries.

Philip, who had eaten nothing, marked Mrs. Upottery for his lawful prey. He had never, in such brief part of his life as had been devoted to silken dalliance, achieved astounding victories over the young, but among elderly ladies he had always been a favorite. There was something in his eyes which appealed to elderly ladies, and he had an idea that that something would not in vain appeal to Mrs. Upottery. He waited for her to rise, meaning to follow her out, but she did not rise. Instead of rising, she took a small book from her pocket, and began to read; it was a prayer-book of the Church of England. One by one the guests departed, and at length Mrs. Upottery and the young man who meant that his eyes

DOUBLOONS

should appeal to her, were left alone together. Her eyes wandered from the prayer-book, and were accidentally caught by his. She was in his net.

"Mrs. Upottery?" he addressed her earnestly, with a serious smile.

"Young man!" Her tone was deep and formidable, but not unfriendly.

"I'm sure you've been fearfully bothered and worried by all sorts of people this morning, but I'm charged with a special mission of inquiry by a big daily paper, and I wondered if you would —" He stopped.

"If I would what?" she positively smiled in her turn.

"If you would mind telling me the whole history of your relations with the late Captain Pollexfen."

"I *have* been bothered and worried," said Mrs. Upottery. "And to-morrow is his funeral. I hope you will go to it, young man. I think it is the duty of everyone in the house to go to it, as a mark of re — respect."

Her voice faltered, and she hid her face in the black-bordered handkerchief.

"Certainly," said Philip. "Certainly."

"It's at B-Brompton," sobbed Mrs. Upottery.

He assured her that he would attend the funeral, and he was about to excuse himself from troubling her further when she astonished him by saying, as she wiped her eyes:

"What do you want me to tell you?"

He replied eagerly:

"I want you to begin at the beginning and tell me everything. I'm sure we shall come across something that may lead to a clue."

DOUBLOONS

"Here?" she queried, looking round, and, not waiting for his answer, she said: "Yes. Come and sit near me. I'm rather deaf."

"Now, how did you first become acquainted with the Captain?" Philip demanded, obeying her, and trying to feel as much like a journalist as he could.

She turned on her chair to face him; her lips trembled in the effort to articulate; a terrific sob escaped her, and she fell against him, seeming partly to lose consciousness. Then, as if ashamed of this weakness, she somehow found her feet and sank back on her chair.

"Brandy," she whispered. "Get me some brandy, young man."

She was breathing heavily.

Philip, vastly disconcerted, raced from the room, and called a boy. After some delay, brandy was obtained and administered; then he assisted Mrs. Upottery up-stairs, finding her very heavy and unwieldy, especially on the basement steps.

At the door of her room she stopped.

"Thank you, young man," she said. "You are the first person who has been kind to me, since his — his —"

"Don't talk," said Philip, "if it upsets you."

"I cannot talk of it," she answered. "But I can write it all down, and I will, too. It may calm me. I will do it to-night, this very night."

He thanked her. "And may I use what you write in my paper?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Upottery. "It's a very rich and successful paper, isn't it?"

DOUBLOONS

"Very," Philip agreed.

"Well," the lady said meekly. "They must give me a hundred guineas for what I write. It will be worth that."

Philip was thunderstruck. "A hundred guineas!" he muttered.

"Yes," said Mrs. Upottery. "Of course, not for myself, young man. I shall give it to the Sailors' Home at Southampton, where once my poor — my poor —"

Tears silenced her. Philip consented. He had *carte blanche*.

At seven o'clock precisely he re-entered the Brent Building.

"On which floor is Lord Nasing's room?" he demanded of the lift-boy.

"You can't see 'is lordship," the boy answered.

He was a tall, loutish lift-boy, graduating in the Brent school of manners, to which Philip was not accustomed. He therefore took the boy's ear between his finger and thumb and pressed the second finger into a particular spot behind the ear. In five seconds the lift was wafting him upwards.

"Now, show me Lord Nasing's door," said Philip. "I'm not very good at geography."

"I daren't leave the lift," the boy protested.

"Come," said Philip.

The boy came.

"And now knock at the door for me."

The boy knocked.

"And now run away to your lift, and remember to know me next time I come."

There was no reply to the knock. However, as he had a definite appointment, Philip entered. The room was empty.

DOUBLOONS

One electric light burned over the great round table; by way of illumination there were also the dull yellow horizontal rays of the electric heater in the fireplace; they showed to advantage the pattern of the carpet.

Philip coughed loudly.

"Who are you?" said a valet, coming noiselessly out of an adjoining room.

"My name is Masters," said Philip. "And I have an important appointment with Lord Nasing at seven o'clock."

"Well, I should advise you to hook it," said the valet.

"Listen, my friend," Philip was beginning, when Lord Nasing strolled into the room in the wake of his man. He was tying a white necktie at the summit of a broad alp of shirt-front.

"You're there!" said Philip, relieved. "I thought it was very strange if you'd forgotten me."

His greeting so affected the valet that the latter disappeared into the next room to conceal his sense of humor.

Lord Nasing dropped the ends of his necktie. Then, having considered the situation, he laughed. There was nothing else to do.

"Oh!" said he, "you're the young man that's got charge of the Corner House affair."

"I am," answered Philip very dryly. He had been called "young man" just once too often that day, and Lord Nasing was the final offender.

"What have you done?"

"Are you engaged for dinner?" Philip asked him, as if at the sword's point.

DOUBLOONS

"N-no," said Lord Nasing, quite unused to these tactics from his legionaries.

"Well," said Philip. "Come along and dine with me at the Savoy, and I'll tell you there what I've done. I'm too exhausted to talk till I've got some Burgundy inside me."

Silence reigned for a space in the council chamber

"Straker," Lord Nasing called.

"My lord?" the valet appeared.

"My coat. Mr. Masters has been good enough to ask me to dine with him at the Savoy."

"If you don't mind," Philip added, "we'll go into the grill-room, as I'm not dressed."

He was strangely enthusiastic in his new profession. He reckoned that he was succeeding. And certainly his exit in company with Lord Nasing from the Brent Building gave currency to a rumor among the innumerable staff that he was.

The reception of the pair in the grill-room of the Savoy, where Lord Nasing was well known, amounted to a triumph for Philip.

"And now," said he over the soup, "I'll tell you what I've done. Well, I've spent about a hundred and eighty pounds."

Lord Nasing arrested his spoon.

"You're a costly luxury," said his lordship. "No wonder you ask me to dinner."

"Not at all. I'm cheap. In return for that trifling sum I've secured a long signed article by Mrs. Upottery — it will be delivered to-morrow — giving the entire history of her relations with the dead man, and also interviews, with signed statements, from thirty-one out of the sixty boarders in the

DOUBLOONS

house. I've also secured a long article from myself of unique interest. And, look here!"

He tumbled a heap of rough photographic prints from his pocket.

"Here are photographs of the house; the sewer; the Captain's room, where the murder was probably committed; the stairs; a group of boarders at lunch; the crowds in the street; separate portraits of forty boarders. See this photograph of Mrs. Upottery! Also these photographs of policemen and detectives. Never before, I fancy, has a newspaper had photographs of detectives in the act of detecting. And here, photograph of the 'Volga' — the Captain's last command. Also a collection of portraits of Giralda."

"Good!" said Lord Nasing. "Good. But where's the murderer?"

"All in due course," Philip replied. "All in due course. I have only been at work ten hours."

Suddenly Lord Nasing laughed,

"What's the joke?" Philip ventured to inquire.

"I was just thinking," Lord Nasing answered. "Supposing you are the murderer — you might be, you know! — what a scoop it would be for the *Courier* in the end!"

"Yes, wouldn't it!" Philip concurred.

At the end of the generous but rapid meal he asked for the bill, and opened his pocket-book to get a bank-note. He unfolded his bundle of notes. The note that first met his eye was one for £100, which constituted rather less than half of his entire fortune. He read mechanically the number and date, "²⁷_G 687606 London, 15th May 1904." And the room began

DOUBLOONS

to rock and the world to be unreal. The numbers of the notes handed to Captain Pollexfen by his employers on the fatal Tuesday had been published everywhere. And this note was one of them. Philip knew the numbers by heart.

He commanded himself, discovered a fiver, put the other notes back into his pocket-book, and paid the bill.

XIII

A DISCOVERY

PHILIP'S departure from the Savoy grill-room was accomplished with the irreducible minimum of formality; and the cloak-room attendant had a narrow escape of being maimed for life, merely because of a slight tendency toward ritualism in the delivery of the journalist's hat and coat. As for Lord Nasing, abandoned with such breath-taking brusqueness, Louis the Fourteenth, when someone pitched the bed-hangings into the middle of his supper-table, was far less astonished than he. Lord Nasing's sole comfort centered in a moral certainty that Masters must after all be the criminal himself. Philip bounded into a cab, and told the driver to drive, in an unmentionable manner, to the Devonshire Mansion. He drew again the pocket-book from his pocket. Happily the cab was the last work of civilization in cabs, and had a small oil-lamp fixed in its interior, so that Philip could examine the bank-note thoroughly and at leisure. Not only was there no mistake about the number of the note, but he had another note for a hundred pounds, and that also bore one of the advertised numbers. He thus held in his possession two of the notes which the shipping firm had paid to Captain Pollexfen on the day of the latter's murder. No wonder his hand trembled and he forgot for the

DOUBLOONS

moment that he was a journalist, and therefore *ipso facto* imperturbable!

Oxwich, who might with advantage have started a school of imperturbability for young journalists, opened to him on the fifth floor of the Devonshire Mansion.

"Sir Anthony in?"

"Yes, sir. But he's expecting —"

"I must see him instantly," said Philip. "Instantly!"

Oxwich had a great power of grasping a situation.

"Certainly, sir," and without another word he escorted Philip to the drawing-room. Sir Anthony was walking nervously to and fro; an unrivaled bud of the "Catherine Mermet" rose in his buttonhole. He jumped as the door opened.

"Say, Tony!" Philip spluttered out.

"Look here, old man," Sir Anthony stopped him with a rapid flow of words. "Awfully glad to see you. But you can't stop here. Josephine has dined with me down below in the restaurant, and she's just gone for a moment to see Kitty, and then she's coming here, and we're going to try over one of her songs, and then I have to drive her to the Metro., or she'll be late. She comes on at 9.20. It's a fearful bore, but what can I do? See you afterwards, eh?"

"I don't care for fifty Josephines," said Philip, producing his pocket-book. "How do you explain this —?"

The door opened again.

"Here she is," Tony whispered. "Skip, my son!" He glanced at the door, and his face suffered a great change. It did not merely fall, it fell to pieces. "Mildred!" he exclaimed.

DOUBLOONS

"My darling Tony!" twittered a fluffily-dressed and maturely handsome woman, who floated across the room in a maze of chiffons, and then took Tony by the neck. After which, on perceiving Philip, she gave a little "Oh!" of coquettish surprise.

"My friend, Philip Masters," said Tony, disengaging himself. "Phil, this is my sister, Mrs. Appleby."

"I'm always delighted to meet my Tony's friends," Mrs. Appleby asserted, sailing down upon Philip.

It was at once evident that she conducted her existence exclusively in the superlative degree. There are many such women. They invariably remain stationary at the age of thirty-eight, spend the largest possible sums on costume, and fight eternally against *embonpoint*. Their husbands are usually dead, and if they have not a wonderful young son, they have a wonderful young daughter. Mrs. Appleby had a son, as soon appeared.

"And what are you doing in town?" Tony demanded, with a pitiable effort to be joyous and enthusiastic.

"It's poor Horace," his sister replied, sinking with a sad sigh, but gracefully, into a chair. "He's unwell again. He telegraphed for me this morning, and I drove to Crewe and caught the eleven express. It doesn't seem to be anything serious, but really something will have to be done. For his age — fourteen. Mr. Masters — he's wonderfully advanced. In fact, his tutor can't keep him back. He tells me he was going into permutations and combinations next week! Just imagine that! But his constitution won't stand it. And I fancy there's something in the air of Blackheath. I shall have

DOUBLOONS

to take him away. He looks on you as quite a second father, Tony, dear, and as I —”

Oxwich showed himself in the doorway. He said nothing. He merely interrupted the discourse by gazing at Sir Anthony in a fashion which indicated alarm, regret, impotence, and entreaty. Disturbing sounds were to be heard in the corridor.

“And as I —” Mrs. Appleby vivaciously resumed.

“Half a second, Mildred!” Tony said, almost blushing, and hurried out of the room, only half shutting the door.

Philip and Mrs. Appleby regarded one another — Philip all the while burnt up with a suppressed fever and nearly light-headed.

“And as I always consult dear Tony in these —” Mrs. Appleby recommenced, with a siren’s smile.

“Just so!” said Philip, and left her in order to follow Tony.

“Sister, indeed!” he heard an irate voice. “Then why should your silly Oxwich keep me out?” And his eye caught the last six inches of Josephine’s skirt as she whisked magnificently from Tony’s flat

Tony gazed blankly at Philip. Oxwich completely shut the door on Mrs. Appleby.

“I must go after her immediately,” said Tony.

“In your place, Sir Anthony, I should delay twenty-four hours,” Oxwich remarked, in low, respectful tones.

“Impossible, Oxwich.”

“If not forty-eight — if not forty-eight,” Oxwich pursued. “Pardon the liberty, Sir Anthony —”

“See here!” cried Philip, careless of being heard, and brandishing his notes. “You paid me these notes on Wednes-

DOUBLOONS

day morning. Look at the numbers. Take them and look at them, I tell you."

Sir Anthony obeyed, somewhat awed by his friend's virulence.

"Well?" Sir Anthony inquired. "What? Are they forged?"

"I wish they were!" Philip answered. And he explained. Sir Anthony, not unnaturally, was difficult to convince; but after Oxwich had consulted two different newspapers and ascertained that the numbers were indeed those of two notes belonging to the murdered Captain, the baronet was at any rate reduced to astounded exclamations. By that time they had retreated to the dining-room.

"Oxwich," he demanded, at length. "Where did we get these notes?"

"From Miss Fire," Oxwich replied, full of finely-controlled emotion. "We had no other hundred-pound notes. Miss Fire repaid them to us on Tuesday night. You will remember, Sir Anthony, that you expressed surprise."

"I'd lent her a monkey to get her aunt's husband out of a difficulty, or some rot or other," Tony said quickly to Philip. "That was last week. And on Tuesday she told me she only needed three hundred, and she gave me two hundred back."

"What time was that?"

"What time was it, Oxwich?"

"About midnight, Sir Anthony."

"It is I who must go after her, then," said Philip. "And at once!"

"I'll go with you," Sir Anthony muttered, excitedly. "This is a most serious thing."

DOUBLOONS

"Serious?" Philip cried. "Why, it's the key to the entire situation! Come on." He snatched the notes.

"It will be difficult to neglect Mrs. Appleby, Sir Anthony," said Oxwich "She informed me that she had not yet dined."

"Oh, conf —! Go and tell Mrs. Appleby, Oxwich, that — No, I'll go myself."

He rushed to the drawing-room.

Philip waited perhaps five seconds. It became a moral and physical impossibility for him to wait longer. He fled, ran headlong down the grand staircase of the Devonshire because the lift was not attending his convenience, and, disdaining the aid of six porters, shot into a cab. He still held the notes loose in his hand.

His adventures between the stage-door of the Metropolitan Theater and Josephine's dressing-room could not have been adequately described in less than five columns of the *Courier*. He had to defy the stage-doorkeeper, a majestic personage who had once said "No" to an Under-Secretary of State, and who was reported to buy a public-house or so once a quarter out of the tips he received from aspirants to the hands of the queens and princesses of the Metropolitan's two stages. He outdistanced two commissioners detailed off in pursuit, lost himself, found himself before the footlights — happily during an *entr'acte* — invoked the assistance of the mistress of the ballet — a kind and fat old thing, whose triumphs dated back to the Third Empire — and finally had to arrange matters financially with a call-boy and Josephine's dresser, who was also, by a curious accident, Josephine's aunt. Josephine, in the famous dressing-room lined

DOUBLOONS

with mirrors and littered with expensive frippery — pots, pans, bouquets, torn envelopes, boxes, sweeties, curling-irons, music, overturned chairs, and photographs — was perfecting the work of nature.

She glanced sternly at Philip, pencil in hand, and indescribably glorious as to *peignoir*.

"Well!" she said, "I call this *cheek*; that's what I call it. If you think you're going to make peace on Tony's behalf, old boy, you're mistaken. So you can go and tell him I said so."

A gas-jet hissed among the electric lights.

"I don't care twopence for Tony. It's more important than Tony —"

"That's enough!" She made a gesture. "How much have you given Auntie to stop outside? Call her in."

Philip approached close to her.

"Please don't be silly, Miss Fire," he said sternly. "In the first place let me tell you I'm on the staff of the *Courier*. And in the second place, have you seen these notes before?"

He laid them in front of her on the splashed untidy dressing-bench.

She was daunted. She stared vaguely at the notes.

"How do I know if I've seen them before?" she grumbled. "I've seen many a hundred-pound note in my time."

"You gave them to Tony at midnight on Tuesday," he said.

"And what if I did?"

"They're stolen notes," he replied, and breathed the single sinister word "Pollexfen."

DOUBLOONS

"If you want to know, then," said Josephine, who was recovering her ground, "I just didn't give them to Tony on Tuesday at midnight; I gave him two notes, but they were old notes, and these are new. So there!"

"How can you prove that?"

"Mr. Sinclair can prove it."

"Who is Mr. Sinclair?"

"Mr. Sinclair is the assistant cashier. He cashed a check for me on Tuesday afternoon, and he gave me the notes."

"I must see Mr. Sinclair."

"Oh, you can see Mr. Sinclair all right. Auntie!" She opened the door. "Run and ask Mr. Sinclair to come here as quick as he can." She shut the door, and stood facing Philip, her hands on her hips, breathing hard. "You shall soon see Mr. Sinclair," she repeated, "and Mr. Talke shall see if I am to be insulted in my own dressing-room like this!"

"My dear young lady," said Philip, "I'm not insulting you. Tony told me he'd had those notes from you."

"Well, he'd no business to chatter," said Josephine sharply. "He's like a blessed magpie."

"Wouldn't you sooner have me here than the police?" Philip smiled. "Why, I'm doing all I can for you."

"Oh, of course," she murmured.

Then Mr. Sinclair, in one of those amazingly perfect evening suits that only the minor officials of fashionable theaters seem to be able to afford, deferentially entered.

He confirmed Josephine's statement. Further, he took Philip to his office, and showed him a memorandum of the numbers of the notes handed by him to Miss Fire on

DOUBLOONS

Tuesday afternoon; they did not correspond with Philip's notes at all.

Philip left the theater, and passed Tony entering. And each was thinking so hard that neither recognized the other. Philip walked slowly to the Corner House. He believed in the honesty of Josephine Fire, and equally of course, in Tony's honesty. There remained two explanations of the almost inexplicable. Oxwich was one possible explanation; but Philip could not conceive Oxwich as an accomplice of thieves and murderers. Philip himself was the other explanation. Had someone entered his cubicle while he slept, and substituted two of the Pollexfen notes for Philip's? It was inconceivable. For Philip had kept his pocket-book where John Meredith kept the key of his room — under the pillow. And he was a light sleeper. Then —?

He made his way into the Corner House. He climbed the stairs, and went to his room. After turning up the light, the first thing he saw was his little black bag, lying on the bed. He sprang to it, and opened it. The finger-marked stone was inside, with the pajamas and other things. He ran into the corridor, and by chance encountered one of the boy attendants.

"Who did my room to-day?"

"Me, sir."

"What's the meaning of that bag on the bed?"

"It was under the bed," said the boy, made sullen by Philip's threatening tone; "I thought you'd kicked it under without knowing, so I put it on the bed for you to see."

XIV

DACTYLOGRAPHY

AT dusk on the following afternoon, which was Sunday afternoon, Philip was curled up in the office of Mr. Hilgay like a spider awaiting its prey. He had woven his web, and he still expected a genuine fly, though his patience had nearly exhausted itself. Mr. Hilgay, happily for Philip's plan of campaign, had been visible, a broken figure, during the middle hours of the day. Mr. Hilgay was still not quite persuaded that he had escaped brain fever.

During the morning Philip had employed himself in making experiments in the recording of finger-marks, for he was convinced, first, that he possessed, in the bit of broken sewer pipe, an authentic finger-mark of Captain Pollexfen's murderer, and, secondly, that the murderer still inhabited the house. Being of a profoundly practical nature, in the English manner, he did not permit his mind to be too much concerned about the history of the little black bag between the moment when he lost sight of it on the Tuesday evening and the moment when he saw it again on the Saturday evening. He guessed that Varcoe must have discovered it and left it, by accident or intentionally, in his bedroom on the Friday night. This having been divined, he centered his interests exclusively on the imprint. He did not even trouble to answer the feverish

DOUBLOONS

inquiries and demands which from time to time during the day he received from various members of the editorial staff of the *Courier*.

Now, Philip was not an expert in the science of finger-prints. It may be doubted if he knew that it had been christened dactylography. He certainly was not aware of the method of classifying finger-prints into the four main divisions of arches, loops, whorls, and composites. He did not dream that arches might be simple and tented, loops ulnar and radial, whorls single and double, and that composites were susceptible of no less than four clearly defined divisions. It may be questioned if he had the slightest idea that Scotland Yard has a record of nearly a million finger-prints, and that the system of indexing this vast dictionary of criminal biography is one of the wonders of the world. It is beyond doubt that he had not read the learned work of the celebrated Five Towns specialist, Henry Faulds; for that work had not then appeared. What he had read, on its publication some ten years before, was Mark Twain's "Pudd'n-head Wilson," in which the immortal and adorable author of "Life on the Mississippi" had the charming caprice to explain the science of dactylography at considerable length. And his recollection even of that unforgettable romance was not by any means free from vagueness. He had reasons for not going down to Scotland Yard and demanding there the aid of the supreme expert in dactylography. Finally, the day being dominical, all booksellers' shops were closed.

He had, therefore, to rely solely on the finger-mark itself, and his common-sense or gumption. After various trials, and

DOUBLOONS

sundry dyeings and washings of his own fingers, he decided that the finger-mark on the fragment of pipe was that of a right hand first finger, not of a thumb. This fact filled him with hope, for a reason which will presently be seen. He further argued that the hand of the criminal must be short and stumpy, with broad, flat finger-tips; and, moreover, that it was not a hand lately accustomed to hard manual work, for the natural ridges on the skin were indicated with extraordinary clearness, whereas the epidermis of a laborer's hand is either worn to smoothness or wrinkled in artificial furrows.

To establish the criminal's identity, he had merely to obtain the impress of the first fingers of each man lodging in the Corner House. But to accomplish such a delicate, invidious task, without arousing suspicion, was a matter which would have offered difficulties, even to a more impassioned journalist than Philip.

He spent the chief of the morning in a series of experiments with paint and paper and varnish, left in the corridors by the professional house painters who had stormed and occupied the house. And after several hours, he had prepared two sets of slips of plain green wall paper, one lightly covered with white paint, half-dried at a fire, and the other lightly covered with varnish half-dried at a fire — the kitchen fire. Lunch was over by the time his slips was ready.

He then, with the privity of Mr. Hilgay, who, during his brief appearance, seemed ready to allow anyone to do anything, removed the door-knobs from the inner front-door and the outer front-door of the house. Both these doors, of course,

DOUBLOONS

opened inwards, Secondly, by means of small slips of wood nailed to the floor near the hinges, he fixed both doors permanently ajar in such wise that an aperture of three or four inches was left between each door and door-frame. Thirdly, he affixed a perpendicular slip of paper covered with half-dry white paint to the outer side of the inner door, and a slip covered with half-dry varnish to the outer side of the outer door.

And he argued thus:

“Any person leaving the house, the handles of the doors having been thoughtfully removed, must inevitably first of all put the fingers of his right hand on the outer side of the inner door and pull the door towards him in order to go out. He may or may not leave a good impress of his fingers on the paint-covered slip of paper. But paint will certainly adhere to his hand. He may or may not be angry, but he will certainly proceed, and he will repeat his action on the outer side of the outer door, and will thus leave a second set of finger-marks in white paint, on the outer door. I shall thus have two sets of marks for each outgoing person. As the doors open inwards, incoming persons will have to push the doors instead of pulling them; they will thus be forced to touch the same pieces of paper, but in the reverse order.”

He was excessively proud of this device; and after affixing the first two pairs of slips, he joined one of the boy-servants on duty in the little office in a state of mind that amounted almost to glee. His stock of prepared slips lay near him on the table, and the finger-marked fragment of pipe was put out of the reach of boy-servants on the high mantelpiece. His

DOUBLOONS

whole heart was in the experiment, so much so that he utterly forgot his promise to Mrs. Upottery to attend the Captain's funeral, and contemptuously ignored a telephone message from Sir Anthony to run down to the Devonshire Mansion and discuss the situation.

He waited eagerly for someone either to go out or come in. The whole world of human beings seemed, however, to have formed a conspiracy neither to enter nor to leave the Corner House. Never had the entrance hall been so quite. Even the detectives and the journalists had deserted it. A number of Sabbath sightseers were parading to and fro in the street and gazing at the house with mouths open as if to swallow it. But there was no other sign of life. The boy attendant was reading Percival's "Paris Gossip" in the *Referee*, having finished "Mustard and Cress." Then Philip heard someone coming down-stairs, and his heart began to flutter as the instant approached for testing the efficacy of the web of the spider. It was a man.

The man wore gloves.

Philip had reckoned without the renowned gentility of the Corner House. He rightly cursed himself for a fatuous ninny as he removed the smudged slips of paper after the man's exit and substituted fresh slips. But nevertheless he determined to continue his experiment, opining that there would be, after all, in the Corner House, far from sufficient gloves to go round. In this assumption the event proved him to be correct. The event did not, however, justify his experiment. People entered, people departed. A few wore gloves. The ungloved majority either made undecipherable finger-

DOUBLOONS

marks, or made good finger-marks which bore not the slightest resemblance to the finger-mark on the bit of pipe.

So dusk fell, and Philip's stock of paper was exhausting itself in futility. He foresaw that he might have to continue the experiment for days.

He heard a cab stop outside the house, and glanced idly from the window. It was a four-wheeler. Mrs. Upottery emerged from it. She was obviously returning from the funeral. He sympathized with her, but her arrival annoyed him; he had already wasted several slips of paper on women, including two on Mrs. Upottery. She held an argument with the cabman, and then she had a difficulty with her pocket and purse, and seemed to find an awful and solemn pleasure in tiring the patience of the cabman while she removed her gloves and sorted her coins. As she came up the steps he hid in a corner so that she should not glimpse him in passing. He did not wish to be accused just then of not having attended the funeral. He was creeping out to change the slips after her passage when a man clad in black ran quietly up the steps and hurried in. It was John Meredith, whom Philip had not previously seen that day. . . . But why should Philip have trembled with nervous apprehension at the sight of Meredith? Why should a strange and terrible fear have seized him? Why should he hesitate, after Meredith had vanished up-stairs, to retrieve and examine the slips? Why should he have experienced the sensation of a reprieve when a newspaper boy burst in, pushing and banging both doors, to sell a special Sunday edition of the *Record*?

The newspaper boy departed, and the hand of Masters

DOUBLOONS

shook as he detached the slips and carried them into the office. The varnished slip from the outer door showed nothing but three sets of smudges, but the other slip, marked faintly in varnish on white paint, displayed three very clear finger-prints — the man's the highest; then the woman's; then the newspaper boy's. His heart jumped when he examined the first. He reached down the fragment of pipe, laid it close to the paper, and, with a magnifying glass, compared it with the new impression. There could be no shadow of doubt, no smallest chance of error. The print of the man's first finger corresponded exactly with the print on the stone. The double whorl, situated slightly to the left, was identical in each case.

Without giving himself a moment to think, he went out of the office to find Meredith. And he met Meredith descending down-stairs again, pale and hurried. The frightful scar flamed crimson on his blanched face.

"Please come in here," Philip addressed him. His throat was so parched that he could scarcely articulate.

"What is the matter?" Meredith questioned.

"I must speak to you."

Meredith obeyed, entering the office. Philip ordered the boy attendant to leave, and then carefully shut the door. He had a strange desire to advise Meredith to run away and never be seen in England again, but he conquered it.

"What is it?" Meredith repeated his demand.

"I will tell you," said Philip. "The finger-mark on this stone was made by the murderer of Captain Pollexfen, and the finger-mark on this paper was made by you. They are

DOUBLOONS

absolutely alike. I have laid a trap for the murderer, and it is you that I have caught. What have you to say?"

"What?" exclaimed the younger man, staring at the paper.

"Which mark?"

"This one."

"But those cannot be the marks of my small fingers," Meredith said with curious calm, after he had comprehended the nature of the trap. "Those below must be mine. Look for yourself." His persuasive voice was as wondrous as ever.

Masters seized the outstretched hand. It had fine tapering fingers, whereas the topmost impressions were noticeably wide and clumsy.

"It is like a woman's," said Philip, loosening his grasp, yet not releasing the fingers that by some strange magic thrilled his own.

The other impulsively snatched the hand away, and then sat down on a chair and burst into tears.

"It is a woman's," said Meredith. "I am Captain Pollexfen's daughter."

"Good God! Giralda?"

Meredith nodded, looking up.

XV

UNCLE WALTER

THE confession of Meredith's identity had the singular effect of making Philip undeniably and astonishingly happy. He asked himself, indeed, why the fact that Meredith was Giralda in disguise should render him so absurdly joyous. He pretended to himself that there was no logic in the feeling of pleasure. But that was pretense merely. He knew in the depth of his being that his joy was firmly based in the logic of the heart. He perceived now why he had liked Meredith from the moment of their first meeting, and why he had always been conscious of an apparently strange instinct to protect and assist Meredith. The disguise had deceived his brain, but it had not deceived the instinctive, inarticulate, unerring heart of him.

"So you are Miss Pollexfen?" he questioned, with a wondering smile, the power of whose persuasiveness he did not guess.

"I am Mary Pollexfen," was the half shy reply.

Of course she was a woman! Despite her clothes, she was for Philip, as she faced him there in the little green, confined office, with its desk and ledgers, the most intensely feminine woman that the world contained. How came it that his in-

DOUBLOONS

tellectual apparatus had never discerned her sex? How came it? But his mind was full of queries.

"It is very strange," said Philip, "that I did not recognise you as Giralda. Because I had seen your portrait at the Physique Club, and, what is more, the portrait has positively haunted me."

"I do not think it is very strange, after all," Mary Pollexfen answered. "You see, I am pretty expert at making up. Seven years ago I played nothing but 'principal boy' — on account of my height, I suppose; so I was well used to men's things. And then the scar absolutely changes my face."

"But when did you get that awful wound?"

"I paint it each morning," Mary Pollexfen explained, faintly smiling at Philip's astonishment. "It was by accident a long time ago that I found out how a scar across the cheek like that seemed to alter the position of the cheek-bone and make all my face different."

"Then you can wash it off at any time?"

"Certainly."

"You relieve me immensely, Miss Pollexfen," Philip sighed.

"Unfortunately," said she, "my hair won't grow quite as easily as I can wash off that scar."

There was a significant pause.

"And now, Miss Pollexfen," said Philip, courageously, "don't you think we had better come to business at once?"

"Business?" she echoed the word, as if startled.

"Yes," he said; "don't you think you had better tell me why you are here in disguise? I know you must be in great

DOUBLOONS

sorrow. I guess you are in great difficulty. And I am just as sure as I am of anything that I can help you. ”

“How can you help me?” she stammered timidly, gazing self-consciously at the desk.

“I shall be able to answer that question better when you have talked to me a little. Talk to me. Tell me. I would be willing to do a great deal for you — a very great deal. I’ve no intention of informing you that I would cheerfully sacrifice my life to save your little finger from harm; because if I began in that strain I should feel an awful ass. Still” — he nodded his head several times quickly as though to emphasize his words — “you may command me.” He looked at her steadily.

“Really?”

Her manner of uttering that single word enchanted Philip. In her tone there was something of entreaty, something of an unserious and delicious incredulity, something of a challenge, and something queen-like. He seemed to see in her at length the worshiped beauty of the stage — not at all spoilt by incense and homage, but yet aware of the potency of her charm, and accustomed to the vows of devotees.

“Really!” he insisted.

They exchanged a glance. And that glance established their relations. In the brief instant of its duration each formed a resolve, the one to trust, the other to shield; and the resolve was momentous, definite, and final.

Mary Pollexfen sat down.

“Can we talk here?” she demanded suspiciously, looking at the door.

DOUBLOONS

"Where else can we talk?" Philip asked. "The door is shut. I'll keep an eye on it. Now, will you tell me why you are here in this disguise?"

"I came to look after my father," said Mary. "I came to watch over him. Perhaps you will say it was a childish idea, but —"

"And a disguise was necessary for that?"

"Yes. If my poor father had had the slightest idea that I was meddling in his life he would have left the place."

"You were not quite on good terms, was that it?"

Mary Pollexfen agreed with a gesture.

"We had quarreled," she said. "We had not spoken to each other for several years. I was very sorry — very sorry to upset him, and very sorry that he would not see me — but I could not help it."

"Yes?" Philip encouraged her.

She was now on the opposite side of the desk from Philip, idly and nervously pleating a piece of paper into the form of a fan. Then she leaned her head on one hand.

"It was all about me going on the stage," she proceeded. "I had always wanted to go on the stage. The stage was in my blood. But my father hated the stage. Perhaps he had cause to. He left me at school at Southend and went on a voyage, and when he came back from his voyage I was an actress on tour with a provincial company. Not a No. 1 company, Mr. Masters, but a wretched little company doing fit-up towns. I hadn't written to my father to tell him. I dared not. At least, perhaps I dared; but somehow I could not put the words on the paper. So it was a terrible surprise for him when

DOUBLOONS

he did come back and learnt the news. I got a cousin of ours to tell him."

"Your mother was dead?"

"Yes; she died when I was a child. Just imagine my position, Mr. Masters. I grew up very quickly. At fifteen I had had enough of school — too much! I could have gone with my father on his ship, perhaps; but, though my father and I used to be great friends, and I like the sea pretty well, I could never have been reconciled to the life on board a tramp steamer. Only my father's wish to be all in all to me could have made him dream of such a thing. I was obliged to live somewhere, then. I could have lived with some cousins, but even at fifteen I had extremely strong likes and dislikes, and the prospect of living with my cousins didn't appeal to me a little bit, though they were perfectly tolerable as acquaintances. What was I to do? Go into a convent? Or begin to earn my living independently?"

"The situation was very awkward, decidedly," said Philip.

"You see that, don't you?" she cried, raising her voice, and, as it were, clutching for his sympathy. "You see that? Well, I wanted to earn my living, and I wanted to earn it in my own way, and I wanted to start at once. People such as I don't choose their careers. Their careers are decided when they are born. Mine was. Nothing could have kept me off the stage. I was very sorry for my father's sorrow, and I think I may say I didn't let his anger make me angry. He couldn't understand. How could he be expected to understand? Supposing that I had suggested to him that he should give up his ship and force himself to go on the stage, he would have

DOUBLOONS

thought I was mad. But that would have been exactly the same thing as his asking me to give up the stage and voyage with him, or live as a lodger with the Sidgwicks — those are my cousins. I tried to explain that to him, but he couldn't see it. He couldn't. He talked about woman's sphere —" She stopped. "Dear, dear father!" she said.

"Then you fought out the question at an interview?"

Mary Pollexfen gave a little shudder, then answered:

"Yes; my company happened to be at Winchester while his ship was taking in cargo at Southampton. He came to see me. I remember I was lodging in a little room in the road up the steep hill out of Winchester — I forget its name. Yes, we fought it out. That was the worst day of my life, except the day after my father's death. And I was only fifteen. I was only fifteen, and he was over fifty. Think of it! Now he is dead something soft in my heart hints that perhaps I ought to have given way. But no. No! It had to be. There are things stronger than affection. I loved my father very dearly. My father loved me. But we parted. He might have used force with me. He very nearly did use force with the manager of the company. I won't tell you what he said when we parted. No one will ever know that except me. Now I think it over, I see that I must have had extraordinary individual force, even at that age — call it obstinacy — to withstand him. He returned to his ship. I went on with my business as the least important member of a touring company of no importance at all."

"Why," said Philip, "it was a tragedy!"

"That's just what it was," said Mary. "And it often

DOUBLOONS

happens that in a real tragedy nobody is to blame — and everyone suffers.”

“Didn’t you see him again?”

“I made two attempts for peace. The first when I was eighteen and the second when I was twenty-one. I saw him once. I insisted on seeing him. It was useless, absolutely useless! Captains live very solitary lives, I think, and that influences them. My poor father’s prejudice against the stage and me only increased as he grew older. Our last direct interview, four years ago, ended everything between us. We drifted apart, as they say — utterly. I found it impossible even to keep in touch with his movements. In fact, I lost him. I didn’t know the name of his new ship. I didn’t know why he had left the old one. I didn’t even know if he was alive. That shows how relatives may get separated, mentally and physically. I never spoke of him. I fancy most of my friends took me for an orphan. Of course, if I am to be perfectly honest, I must admit that I was wrapped up in my own career. And habit is so strong. During the first years of my estrangement I used to send my father the prettiest cards I could buy on his birthday and at Christmas. Then I didn’t know where to send them to — and — and don’t you think it’s very sad, Mr. Masters, such a thing as I am telling you?” The change in her lovely voice was swift and dramatic.

Philip felt the lump in his throat. He could not speak. He nodded.

“These cousins of yours,” he managed to say at length; “they could do nothing to get the Captain to alter his views?”

DOUBLOONS

"Nothing. They were nice, quiet, ordinary people. But they would as soon have dared to come between my father and me as go into — into a den of lions. They were afraid of both of us. They still live at Southend, or rather, just out of Southend. I doubt if they have heard of this affair, even yet."

"And you had no other relatives?"

"Yes," said Mary Pollexfen, in a low tone, drawing her hand nervously along the table. "There was my father's brother, my uncle, Walter Pollexfen. But —"

"But what?"

Mary's eyes moistened. "It is Uncle Walter who —" She stopped with a sort of nervous spasm, and sat up straight, evidently collecting her forces. "I must explain to you about that man," she recommenced. "Although I have never seen him — at any rate, I am not sure that I have ever seen him — I seem to know him intimately."

"How so?"

"From my father's descriptions. And, later, from what the Sidgwicks used to tell me. Walter Pollexfen was ten years younger than my father. He was very precocious indeed as a child. I must have taken after him, as regards being precocious — certainly I didn't take after my father. I think the children of elderly parents often are very precocious. And he was very clever, too — and extremely violent. He was one of those boys who become men all at once. At ten years of age, my father used to say, no one could manage him. No one could do anything with him at all. He was expelled from three schools at Southend before he was twelve. He would listen to

OUBLOONS

nobody. He once locked another boy up in a wooden shed and set fire to it because the boy wouldn't give him half an apple. And it was a mere chance that the boy wasn't burnt to death. He would have been if he hadn't pushed a penknife and everything he had in his pockets under the door of the shed as a ransom. That was the sort of youth my uncle was. He had no mercy on animals at all. And yet my father said that he could be charming when he wanted. At eighteen he married a woman very nearly old enough to be his mother — ran away with her. He had a thick mustache at sixteen."

"An interesting young man!" Philip commented.

"Do you think so?" said Mary. "The stage was his passion, as it's mine. I resembled him in that. And it was because of my uncle's connection with the stage that my father hated it so. Only uncle got tired of the stage pretty soon, and I expect that I shall, too. At nineteen he was playing old men's parts at the Britannia at Hoxton. He was famous in the East End, and people said he might have been one of the most successful actors in London. He was very well known in the profession. The profession thought even more highly of him than the public did, I believe. There are actors like that, you know. He stabbed another actor on the stage of the Britannia one night. It was supposed to be an accident; but, according to what people say, it wasn't an accident at all. However, all this was thirty years ago. Then he went to America."

"And what became of his wife?"

"He deserted her when he was twenty. But just before he went to America he found her again, and he made her go

DOUBLOONS

with him — I suppose because she had come into some money. And then she died in Cleveland.”

“Died!”

“It is supposed that he killed her. I say ‘it is supposed’ — no one except my uncle can be sure. Anyhow, there was a great outcry. Father used to have cuttings of the articles that appeared in the New York and other newspapers about the affair. Uncle had to disappear — at least, he did disappear. After that he must have traveled all over the world. He was in a revolution in Uruguay. He had a circus in Yokohama. But my father only heard rumors of him at long intervals. On the other hand, he seemed always to know where my father was; and from time to time he would write and demand money.”

“And did he get it?”

“Yes, he got it. It would, of course, have been better if he had not got it. But father could never refuse him altogether. I firmly believe that until just before the very last my father had a kind of liking for him. You see he was so much cleverer than father, and father must have been a little afraid of him as well.”

“This was the same brother who has been mentioned at the — the inquest?”

“Yes; there was only one.”

“Then he’s in London now, of course?”

“I’m — I’m afraid so.”

“But you’ve never seen him?”

“No, but I’ve heard from him.”

“When?”

DOUBLOONS

“About three weeks ago I got a strange letter from him. It was addressed to the theater. That letter was the cause of my coming here. I will show it to you; then you can judge for yourself.”

She paused, slowly drew a letter from the pocket of her coat, and handed it to Philip, who opened it and read:

“DEAR MARY,—This is from your old Uncle Walter, whom I dare say you have heard of. Your father is a fool, and you had better bring him to reason, or it will be the worse for him. He’s getting obstinate in his old age. He’s retired from the captaincy business, and he’s got hold of the greatest money-making scheme that I’ve heard of for a pretty long while. He can’t manage it himself. I’m just the man to help him, but he won’t let me. I told him I was starving, and he gave me twenty pounds. It isn’t a question of twenty pounds, it is a question of twenty thousand, and lots more. I only want half the profits, and that’s fair, as I should do all the work. The old fool would simply make a hash of the business. But he won’t see it. I never knew him so obstinate. Now he’s just got to give in. If you know anything about me, you know that candor is my most sublime quality, and I’m candid now. I’m nothing if not candid. You’ve quarreled with your father, I’m given to understand — or, rather, he’s quarreled with you. You’d better go and make it up with him, and warn him that I mean business. When I’m desperate, I’m very desperate; he seems to have forgotten that. Tell him from me that if he doesn’t let me in on the ground floor I’ll take good care that he’s put out of the way of making a single

DOUBLOONS

penny of profit for himself. Tell him that. Your affectionate uncle,

“WALTER POLLEXFEN.

“*P.S.* — Your father is, or will shortly be, at the Corner House, Strange Street, Kingsway.”

Philip folded up the letter, and gave it back to Mary Pollexfen in the midst of an extraordinary silence.

“Of course,” said he, “knowing what you did of your uncle’s character you naturally took that for a serious threat?”

“I did — most certainly. I thought I would go and see my father. Then I decided to write, and I wrote. I didn’t send him uncle’s letter. I thought that might do more harm than good.”

“And then?”

“Then I received an envelope from my father, and the envelope contained my own letter unopened, but torn across. After that I received a telegram from uncle, which I have lost, but it was something like this: ‘Better hurry up. Father now at Corner House.’ Then it was that I suddenly made up my mind to go to the Corner House myself — in this disguise. I had notions about telling the police, but I saw that would be absurd. There wasn’t enough to go on. So you behold me coming to the Corner House, and, in a way, settling down there for a short time. My father had not the slightest suspicion of my identity. I found him very much changed, and very much older. I had no plan. Often at night it appeared to me that I was behaving in a very queer way. But what would you have? What else could I do? I doubt if a woman was ever placed in such a position before. . . . Well,

DOUBLOONS

I had to content myself with keeping watch over my father's movements. This I did as well as I could. And I waited for something to turn up, some fortunate chance. And when something did turn up — it was —”

She hid her face.

“I know, I know!” Philip murmured. “Good Heavens! You may well say that no woman was ever placed in such a situation before!”

“You can imagine the shock to me when I learnt on Wednesday morning that my father had been murdered and his body buried in the trench! I had to keep my wits about me then. I dared not give way. I had to pretend that I was merely casually interested in the tragedy. I couldn't keep from the inquest. And it was the most horrible experience of my life.”

“And you had no theory as to the manner of your father's death?”

“None; that was the worst of it. There I had been waiting ready to protect him when necessity arose — at the first moment that I noticed anything suspicious — and he was gone before I could move a hand! If I had made myself known to my father, he would no doubt simply have left the house. And I could not make myself known to Uncle Walter, because I hadn't the faintest idea where he was.”

“And you have gone through this agony while I have been here!” Philip said. “And I never guessed! It is inconceivable! How unsympathetic you must have thought me the night I besieged you in your room!”

“On the contrary,” said Mary, with a melancholy smile,

DOUBLOONS

"I thought you extremely sympathetic. It was inexplicable to me that you should be so sympathetic."

"Why did you not leave this awful place at once?" Philip questioned.

"What!" she said; "and have detectives following me everywhere? That would have been the very worst thing I could have done."

"True," Philip agreed. "By the way, did you notice much of the courtship between your poor father and Mrs. Upottery?"

"I had no idea of it. And nothing at the inquest surprised me more than Mrs. Upottery's evidence."

"Because," said Philip quietly, "Mrs. Upottery is undoubtedly connected with the murder. As the finger-prints at the top of this paper are not yours, they must be hers. And they constitute absolutely conclusive evidence to my mind. She is an astounding woman. Yesterday she stole two hundred-pound notes out of my pocket-book, and substituted two others, while pretending to faint and be ill. And I had not the least suspicion of her guilt until you showed me that these finger-prints were not yours. It flashed across me then. It is amazing."

"I have been following Mrs. Upottery about for two days," said Mary Pollexfen quietly. "Shall I tell you my notion about her?"

"By all means."

"My notion about her is that she is Uncle Walter himself."

"Impossible!"

"Not impossible! I went to poor father's funeral this after-

DOUBLOONS

noon. Mrs. Upottery was there. Mrs. Upottery and I were the only two people present from this house. It was a dreadful business. And Mrs. Upottery appeared to me to be acting grief with tremendous gusto. Then, when the creature walked from the grave, I seemed to detect in her gait a sort of resemblance to my father's."

"You know your uncle by sight?"

"I have never seen him, unless he is Mrs. Upottery. And I am certain that he is Mrs. Upottery. I feel in my bones that he is Mrs. Upottery!" She stood up, excited. "No one but Uncle Walter could have planned and worked that crime as it must have been planned and worked. And all his evidence at the inquest was pure invention. It would be exactly like him to enjoy disguising himself as a woman, and then to pretend that he was engaged to be married to the man he had murdered, and to embroider the story with details about mysterious foreigners and Russian secret societies. What do you think?"

"If what you say is true," Philip answered her, "your family contains in Mr. Walter Pollexfen a criminal of genius. But we will soon find out."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going up to Mrs. Upottery's room. She — or he — came in just before you did."

XVI

FRIENDSHIP

“**Y**OU are not to come with me,” said Philip, with some new, strange touch of the Kaiser in his tone. His hand was on the office door. He had wrapped in paper the marked fragment of pipe — that invaluable and unique piece of evidence — and put it in his pocket.

“Why not?” demanded Mary Pollexfen rather wistfully, and not at all resenting his little air of authority. There was an appeal in her voice, and her voice was irresistible — or would have been irresistible if he had not considered her personal safety to be involved in the question.

“It will be better not,” Philip replied firmly.

Had he known her on the stage surrounded by the adulation which even some of the most brilliant men in London had not disdained to offer her, he would never have dared to adopt that attitude of the big, wise, autocratic brother. But he had not known her on the stage, and, as a fact, his audacity pleased her enormously; she bowed to it with a feeling of immense relief.

Certainly she pouted, but the pout was naught save a charming affectation.

“I suppose I can go up-stairs to my own room and listen on the landing?” she said.

DOUBLOONS

He agreed that she could; he could find no argument against that.

There were several people in the hall: a policeman, a journalist, pencil in hand, talking to one of the lodgers. Philip, in the pride of his great discovery, ignored their curiosity and passed quickly up-stairs, Mary being at his side, but slightly behind him. And as they went up-stairs it was no more the pride of his great discovery that animated him and flushed his cheek and quickened his heart. It was the mere existence of Mary Pollexfen that did these things. She was so close to him; he had a desire to laugh with sheer joy because she was close to him. The most curious thing that had ever happened to him was that his nearness to a woman, a woman depending upon him and trusting him, should have such an extraordinary and revolutionary effect on him. He was no longer the same man. He felt as though he had been inhaling oxygen. The whole world seemed beautiful. Adrian Hilgay's singular lodging-house seemed beautiful. There was no sorrow on earth — nothing but love and the pure ardor of life. His one regret was that all the previous part of his existence had been so utterly wasted. He cared for nothing that he had once cared for. His old ambitions appeared hollow, puerile, and specious.

He loved now for the first time.

The death of the Captain was, of course, tragic to the last degree, and Mary's grief was his grief, and he ought to be grave, sad, and apprehensive! But — but — well, there she was on the landing with him, breathing somewhat quickly, and gazing at him in expectation! Delicious and adorable

DOUBLOONS

vision, with the painted scar and those absurd clothes! He wondered what strange quality it was in her that differentiated her from all the other women on earth — what quality, beyond her beauty and her grace and her charm, now shone mysteriously from the secret depth of her soul to his. He wondered and rejoiced that some masterful imperial male had not carried her off long since and married her, and forced her to love him. The thought that, if luck had not been on his side, she might have been married ere he met her, made him feel cold in the small of his back, like the sudden sense of a supreme disaster escaped.

"I will come and report — afterwards," he whispered, stopping at her door.

"But what are you going to do?" she asked.

"How do I know?" he said. "It will depend on circumstances. I am going to have an interview with Mrs. Upottery, and I shall be guided by what Mrs. Upottery does. Happily there is a policeman down-stairs. I can promise you one thing — Mrs. Upottery sha'n't get away."

"Have you got a revolver?"

"A revolver? What for?"

"In case —"

"No, I've got these." He raised his broad and muscular hands.

"I should like you to take my revolver," she breathed.

He was about to smile, but a look in her face stopped him. He perceived that jocularly would be misplaced. Tears were in the woman's eyes.

"I shall be very glad to," he said seriously.

DOUBLOONS

She disappeared into her room, and came out again with the revolver, which she gave to him as if it had been an animal alive. "It's loaded," she said.

"Thanks," he murmured, slipping it into his pocket. "Now for it."

He walked up the transverse corridor as far as Mrs. Upottery's door, and knocked discreetly. There was no answer.

He knocked again, and yet again, now loudly, and there was still no answer.

Mary Pollexfen watched him from the corner near her own door. The corridors were otherwise deserted.

"She won't open," Philip called in a whisper, "but I'm going in, all the same."

He was growing bolder every instant. He now knocked very loudly and imperatively. And after a slight pause he shook the handle of the door. The door yielded at once. He pushed it open, and by the light from the corridor he could see the interior of the cubicle, and the cubicle was empty. He entered the little room, found the switch, and turned on the electric light. There was a sound behind him, and he jumped round. Mary stood at the door, her face pale.

"Be careful," she enjoined him.

"Yes," he said; "I know I'm trespassing. But, you see, if Mrs. Upottery arrives and makes a fuss I can always ask the lady for her finger-print; that will quieten her!"

"I didn't mean that," Mary Pollexfen breathed. And she too entered the room stealthily. Her first act was to lift the valance and look under the bed. She found nothing there, and laughed deprecatingly in response to Philip's masculine smile.

DOUBLOONS

"We'll make a thorough search of this room, eh?" Philip suggested. "Suppose I lock the door?"

And he closed and locked the door.

"She must have gone out again," he remarked gaily, apparently unaware that he was stating the obviou. "And we didn't see her go."

"It is to be hoped she — he — didn't notice us together in the office," said Mary.

"And if he did — what then?"

"Who knows?" Mary answered reflectively.

The room was in perfect order. On the bed lay a night-dress case, placed in the mathematical center of the pillow. Behind the door, on hooks, hung two skirts and a petticoat turned inside out.

"I wonder what the waist measurement is?" said Mary, and she took down the petticoat, and, doubling and stretching tight the waistband, put it against her own form. Doubled, it nearly encircled her.

"It's thirty-seven, if it's an inch," said she, hanging it up again.

"But are there women with thirty-seven-inch waists?" Philip demanded naïvely.

"Yes, and forty-seven," said Mary. "There is no limit."

"Then that proves nothing."

And they both felt guilty — nay, criminal — as they investigated the severe orderliness of the room. Several pairs of boots lay at the foot of the bed. But they were smaller than Philip's boots, and the young man's foot was by no means extensive. In the cupboard were a hat, a pair of rather large

DOUBLOONS

gloves, some pieces of ribbon, several veils (all these things black), a pincushion, a Bible, a hymn-book, a copy of "John Halifax, Gentleman," and a number of other articles.

"Here," said Philip, "perhaps you wouldn't mind looking further into this cupboard?"

Mary obeyed, while Philip unfastened a small trunk, which proved to be empty. After some moments Mary found a collection of stockings.

"This feels heavy," said Mary, holding up a pair of stockings tightly rolled.

They examined it together. In the center of the woolen ball was a sum of three pounds five shillings and sevenpence halfpenny. Silently they replaced the money. Then they looked at each other.

"Mrs. Upottery may come back at any moment," said Mary.

"Yes," Philip agreed, daunted.

"Hadn't we better go out of her cubicle?"

"Perhaps it will be as well."

Philip took careful precaution to leave no trace of an inexcusable visit; he extinguished the light, and they found themselves out in the corridor again. Their search had been entirely futile.

"You still think that Mrs. Upottery is your uncle?"

"I do," said Mary obstinately.

"Will you put your hat on and come outside the house at once?"

"What for?" the girl questioned.

"I want to talk to you; we cannot talk here."

DOUBLOONS

In two minutes they were walking together down Kingsway, which was almost empty of traffic; Philip was very nervous, and his companion evidently waited for him to speak. At length he blurted out:

"You'll excuse me, Miss Pollexfen, but this cannot go on like this. Really, you know!"

"What cannot go on like what?" she asked softly, looking ingenuously at him.

"Your disguise," he explained. "It will do no further good. You may rely on me to do whatever can be done. And I should venture to advise you to — to — to be — er — a woman again." He wished to add: "I hate to see you as you are. It hurts me."

"I see," she said reflectively. "But if I become Giralda again all London will get excited. We shall have the police bothering us, and there will be no end to the trouble."

"I do not think the disguise is suitable," he persisted stubbornly. He was surprised to find how stubborn he was. "You need not become Giralda. You can become simply a woman."

"I can't go back to my flat without causing a sensation."

"You could take a room somewhere — a quiet room, or two rooms."

"And where am I to get my clothes from — especially on Sunday?" She hesitated. "I might go to Harry Starkey. I could trust him. He is almost the only person I could trust."

"Harry Starkey?"

"Yes. The costumier. Surely you have heard of Harry Starkey? Everybody knows Harry Starkey."

DOUBLOONS

"I fancy I have seen his name on theater bills," said Philip. Giralda smiled.

"Why, after the King and General Booth he considers himself the best-known man in England."

"Where is his place?"

"In Wellington Street."

A cab loitered past. Philip hailed it.

"Please get in," said he. "And go to this Harry Starkey at once, if you can trust him as you say, and I will meet you in an hour at the corner of Wellington Street — Bow Street, I mean — and Long Acre." He held open the door.

Mary Pollexfen was clearly astonished at such swiftness and authority of decision. She gave him a puzzled glance, then smiled.

"Since you wish it," she said calmly.

They were heavenly words to him. The adorable creature was actually obeying him, actually ceding to his masculine wisdom and his masculine will.

"Starkey's, Wellington Street," she directed the cabman, and got into the vehicle. The cabman nodded.

"He'll be in — your Starkey?" Philip asked her through the window.

"Yes; Sunday is his only day at home. He'll probably be asleep."

"Good! In an hour, then. It is 6.15."

She drove off. As Philip watched the receding cab he felt as if he was floating on clouds of the purest happiness. She did his bidding! She trusted him! She had not even inquired what was to happen when they met again at 7.15. Her

DOUBLOONS

confidence in him was so touching that he detected a moisture in his eyes. The circumstances were miraculous, overwhelming. Less than two hours ago she had been to him John Meredith — simply that! And now she was the rarest among women, and he was more to her than any other man in London! At least, he hoped so.

XVII

A MOVE OF MRS. UPOTTERY'S

HE waited at the corner of Long Acre and Bow Street. One of the seven most dismal streets in London is Long Acre. It is impossible that a street given up to banana merchants and motor-car middlemen — a street, moreover, which is assisting at the slow agony of the horsed-carriage industry — should not be dismal. And on Sundays Long Acre expresses the concentrated dismalness of the entire town. It is a miracle of melancholy. Philip passed the time in trying to guess whether the passers-by were going to the Great Queen Street Wesleyan Chapel, or to the Freemasons' Tavern, or to Queen Charlotte's Hospital. He could not guess. They all looked alike. They were all struggling to live through the awful, mephitic Sabbath gloom of the greatest metropolis in the world.

He had foolishly arrived at the trysting-place too soon. The fact was that he lacked experience in the art of keeping an appointment with a lady. First, he thought it quite conceivable that she, too, would arrive early. Then, when a clock struck a quarter after seven, he began seriously to expect her, and to look for her in four directions at once. At 7.30 he ceased to make excuses for her. At 7.40 he blamed her. Yes, incredible as it may appear, he blamed her;

DOUBLOONS

and it dawned upon him that love does not necessarily connote happiness. At 8 he was alarmed. He decided to stroll quietly and alertly down Bow Street to Wellington Street. She would be obliged to come up Wellington Street. He had not achieved more than fifty yards — he stood between the Opera and the Police Court, those grandiose symbols of pleasure and pain, and was glancing at a poster of a fancy-dress ball at which fabulous prizes were offered — when it occurred to him that Harry Starkey might have sent her somewhere else, and that she might not arrive at the tryst by way of Wellington Street. He flew back to his corner. There was no sign of her. The clock which had struck 7.15 now struck 8.15. She was exactly sixty eternities late. A green King's Cross-Victoria omnibus lurched up the road. "Yet a little space," reflected Philip, "and you will lurch no more up this road, and your horses will be dead and duly eaten, and the motor will rattle past in your stead." He could have sat on the ground and told sad stories of the death of things. He had perhaps never in all his career felt more depressed. He waited, waited, waited, wearing out curbstones under the mournful glint of gas-lamps. Then at twenty-five minutes to nine he observed that a cab had drawn up about five yards east of the corner.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "she may be in that!"

She was.

"I've been here a long time," she said brightly, through a thick veil.

Now, Philip knew that the cab couldn't have been there for more than thirty seconds at the outside. But he said, "I'm

DOUBLOONS

awfully sorry." He had spread his wings, and in an instant had reached the supreme pinnacle of happiness. The foregoing eighty minutes were sponged out of existence. He scarcely noticed that she had no consciousness of being late.

"What are we to do now?" she inquired.

"I will tell you what we are to do now!" he replied with briskness. "Driver, 101 Hanover Street." She made room for him, and he got into the cab.

He pretended not to remark the change in her, but in reality it almost stupefied him. He would not have believed that clothes could make such a difference. She was dressed in mourning — a black skirt and a tailor-made jacket, a large hat with two plumes, and the thick veil encircling her mysterious face as a cloister encloses a nun; white gloves. She was the final word of feminine distinction. She was amazing, bewitching, unique.

It annoyed him exceedingly to remember that the simple, stupid Tony had sat for seventy-three consecutive nights in the same stall to worry her with his stare. An income of fifteen thousand a year surely did not give a man the right to commit such enormities!

"I asked you what we are to do," she said as the cab rolled off.

"I beg your pardon." He started, and then recovering himself: "Have you dined?"

"No."

"Have you by any chance lunched?"

"I think not," she laughed. It was the first time he had heard her laugh.

DOUBLOONS

"So I imagined," he said. "We are going to eat something at the Alcazar, in Hanover Street."

"But, my dear friend," she protested, "I cannot possibly eat in a public place."

"I had thought of that," he replied. "One can have a private room at the Alcazar." ("My dear friend!" His heart blissfully repeated the words.)

"Oh!" she murmured. "Of course."

"So Mr. Starkey fixed you up?" he observed, after a pause.

"Yes, and he was very flattered. He wanted me to stay for dinner. I told him I couldn't."

"And the scar?"

"The scar is gone."

"May I see?" he asked boldly.

She meekly raised her veil and showed him her face, pure and heavenly. Ravishing gesture! Magical episode! Yet she had done nothing but raise her veil, and smile, and lower her veil! And he thought again, "All my life up to this day has been wasted. I have but just begun to live." And if there had only been a luncheon basket in the cab he might have wished that the cab would roll on forever.

At the Alcazar discretion reigns. It is the "note" of the restaurant, which prides itself on being small and select, and on its proximity to St. George's, Hanover Square. Nevertheless, the famed discreetness of the Alcazar scarcely stood the test to which it was subjected when Philip and Miss Pollexfen found themselves in one of its private rooms on the first floor. A venerable waiter had charge of the dinner which Philip ordered — a waiter who knew human nature as only a waiter

DOUBLOONS

attached to a discreet restaurant can know it. The waiter brought in the oysters and placed them between the diners, and hurried out. Mary Pollexfen thereupon raised her veil in order to begin the repast. And then the waiter returned suddenly with a lemon neatly bisected on a charger. He saw Mary's face, and, accustomed though he was to conceal his feelings, they were too many for him on this occasion. One could almost see his startled lips forming the word "Giralda."

Mary made no sign, but just as the waiter was leaving the room again she called him back.

"Waiter!" she said, in her golden voice.

"Madam?"

"You have recognized me, haven't you?"

The aged fellow hesitated.

"Yes, madam."

"I am particularly anxious not to be recognized. Do you understand? I feel sure that you can keep a secret. I fancy you have served me before, somewhere."

"Yes, madam. In the Gold Room of the Grand Babylon. I used to be there. I left when Felix Babylon sold the place to an American millionaire."

"Ah! Well! I am going to rely on you not to recognize me. You will forget utterly that you have seen me."

"Certainly, madam."

She opened a morocco purse, and handed the man a sovereign. He bowed and took it, and immediately returned with it on a plate.

"You may rely on me, madam. But —"

He stopped, extending the plate in a respectful manner.

DOUBLOONS

Mary Pollexfen comprehended that, without witting, she had wounded the feelings of a fellow-creature.

"I beg your pardon," she smiled faintly, and resumed the sovereign.

"Not at all, madam," said the waiter.

The incident was closed, and the dinner proceeded.

It proceeded much too quickly for Philip, who commanded enormous quantities of food in order that the meal might never terminate. They did not talk about the Corner House affair. Pushing aside the terrible actualities that surrounded them, they exchanged opinions about matters of the completest unimportance. It is extraordinary how interesting a discussion, for instance, concerning blue points, natives, Ostends, and Colchesters, may become in the right hands. Philip felt that he was getting to know Mary more intimately every minute. And every minute was delicious, divine, dream-like.

They heard the bell of St. George's.

"It is ten o'clock," she remarked, with a certain significance of tone.

"Yes," he said regretfully; "I suppose we must be going. And then, to postpone the moment, he summoned all his audacity, and hazarded an observation that had been on his tongue for nearly an hour and a half. "Your hair has grown magnificently!" and he added, "if I may say so."

She was indeed wearing a superb coiffure.

"That is Harry Starkey," she replied. "He insisted. He never will do things by halves. He calls himself an artist, and he is one. So he insisted on the hair. He also furnished the

DOUBLOONS

purse, these rings, and my umbrella. As for the hair — *I hope you don't mind.*"

Her voice was so exquisitely apologetic that it made Philip blush. Lo! She was excusing herself to him, now! Not content with accepting his advice, not content with obliging him, not content with trusting him, she was now being humble to his masculine mightiness! It was ineffable.

"*Mind!*" he murmured.

He rang abruptly for the bill, and paid it without the slightest examination. It might justly have been called a heavy bill, but happily he had several sovereigns beyond the two incriminating hundred-pound notes. The aged waiter got back the better part of the refused sovereign in an uninsulting form.

"I will have another go at Mrs. Upottery," Philip said, when they were crossing the pavement in charge of the commissionaire, who, of all the discreet Alcazar staff, was the most discreet. "Kingsway," he ejaculated to the cabman. "I will tell you when to stop."

And in the cab they did not speak; they did not speak at all. Mary was waiting for him to state his plans, and he was wondering what precisely his plans were. He had no desire to speak. He was content in the silent intimacy of the cab.

He stopped the vehicle in Kingsway, a little below Strange Street, and he got out.

"Stay where you are, please," he whispered.

"You are leaving me?" she questioned plaintively.

That night it seemed as if she could say nothing to him that was not intoxicating.

DOUBLOONS

"The famous widow is sure to be back by this time," he answered. "I will see her. At all costs I will see her. If necessary, I will give her into custody at once. In any case, I will come back to you here as quickly as possible. We shall then know better what to do."

She paused.

"Do be careful," she said.

And he went, waving a hand to her, and telling the cabman not to move.

Mr. Hilgay, pale and shaken, had reinstalled himself once more in the little green office. Philip popped his head into the office and put a query to Mr. Hilgay. Mr. Hilgay's reply caused him to whistle a long, high note. He stayed a moment in the hall, and then ran back to the cab in Kingsway.

"You have been quick," said Mary from the mysterious gloom of the cab's interior.

"He's gone!" Philip muttered.

"Who?"

"Mrs. Upottery."

"Gone?"

"Yes. Came in at about seven. Collected all his skirts and things, and went off in a hansom."

"Where to?"

"Into London — Into heaven knows where. He's evidently suspected us, and he's cleared out. I'd give something to know where he *has* gone."

"He may have gone to Poplar," said Mary.

"Poplar? Why Poplar?"

DOUBLOONS

"I told you I'd spent a day or two in following Mrs. Upottery about, didn't I?" Mary answered.

"Of course. I'd forgotten. Well?"

"Twice he went to a house in Poplar — No. 7 Cotton Street. It's off the High Street."

"What sort of a house?"

"I don't know. A house."

"I must go there. I mustn't waste a second. I must go there. No. 7, you say."

"To-night?"

"Instantly."

"But — then I will come with you."

"Excuse me, Miss Pollexfen, you must do no such thing. You must go to a hotel — some quiet hotel — Go to the York. No one will recognize you there. Besides, you can keep your veil on."

"And you? — how shall I know — what —"

"You will hear from me or see me before nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And supposing I don't?"

"But you will. I shall not fail to let you hear."

"But supposing I don't?"

"Well, then, you had better see Sir Anthony Didring, and tell him everything. He's the best friend I have."

"What? Tony a friend of yours?"

He perceived at once from her tone that her appreciation of Tony was neither more nor less serious than it ought to be. And he was glad. Because the mere fact that Tony had enjoyed her acquaintance had given rise to a certain ridiculous jealousy in his heart.

DOUBLOONS

He nodded, smiling.

"Now, it is clearly understood," he said, "you go to the York Hotel, and you stay there."

"As you wish," she answered. "It's impossible for me to thank you sufficiently for all you are doing."

"No. 7 Cotton Street, eh — off Poplar High Street?"

She nodded.

He instructed the driver to go to the York Hotel, gave Mary one glance, raised his hat, and hurried off in search of another cab.

XVIII

THE PLATTER

MONDAY was destined to be a day of cumulative surprises for Sir Anthony Didring. He rose early, in an expectant and nervous condition, and he was consuming grape-nuts in his chamber, under the relentless gaze of Oxwich, before the morning's post, which is always rather later on Mondays than on other days, had passed through the various sorting processes of the Devonshire Mansion and reached his room. When it did come the shocks began. In the first place he had latterly seen nothing of Philip, and a great deal too much of Josephine Fire, and he had sent a messenger to Philip at the Corner House on the Sunday night, the telephone having proved useless. The messenger had not found Philip, and had left a note requesting Philip to write to Sir Anthony by the midnight post, without fail, making an appointment for Monday.

Tony, like all the rest of London, was in a fever of curiosity concerning the latest developments of the Pollexfen affair, and he felt that Philip had unjustly neglected him. He had a million questions to put to Philip, and quite seventy and seven theories to suggest, and he was relying absolutely on receiving some word with his Monday's grape-nuts. But there was no letter from Philip in the little pile; there was not

DOUBLOONS

even a post-card. There was a bill for hose, a prospectus of the Sword Club, a notice from the Serpentine Swimming Club, an invitation to a galanty-show at the Grafton Gallery, and another for a lecture on Socrates at the Hotel Majestic, a note from Josephine breaking an appointment, an emotional epistle from his tailors saying they would need all the help he could give them in the delicate matter of fitting a dress suit recently ordered, and a sisterly letter from his sister, Mrs. Appleby.

On reading the last he interrupted the feast to explain to Oxwich.

"Mrs. Appleby is coming to lunch," he murmured in a voice of manly resignation.

"Certainly, sir. But this is your Turkish bath day."

"I must leave that till to-morrow."

"Certainly, sir. But to-morrow there is your banjo lesson, the dress suit to try on, and the new chauffeur to choose."

Tony stroked a wayward fragment of grape-nut from the lapel of his olive silk dressing-gown.

"Oxwich," he said, with an air of momentous decision, "I sha'n't be able to have my Turkish bath this week; that's the plain English of it."

"I fear so, sir."

"My nephew is coming for lunch, too," said Tony apologetically.

"Master Horace, sir?" Oxwich was obviously pained.

"Well, I haven't got forty nephews. Yes. Master Horace."

"Perhaps I had better lock up the cigarettes, sir?"

"Yes. Now about lunch —"

DOUBLOONS

"Yes, sir. Now about lunch —"

The important question of lunch was on the very point of being discussed when a third shock happened to Sir Anthony, and this third shock was so powerful that the important question of Monday's lunch never was discussed at all. It was forgotten, shelved, adjourned *sine die*. A servant entered the dining-room to say that someone wanted to speak to Sir Anthony.

"Go and see, Oxwich," Tony ordered.

And the Grand Vizier departed to indicate to the visitor the extent of the visitor's absurdity in wishing to see Sir Anthony at a quarter to nine in the morning.

Sir Anthony addressed himself to the newly invented descriptive advertisements in the *Times* newspaper, which at that period were enjoying a greater success in clubs and mansions than anything since the lamented death of De Blowitz.

Oxwich returned almost immediately.

"It's a man with a silver salver, Sir Anthony."

"What do I want with a silver salver?"

"It isn't exactly silver, sir; I should say it's Britannia ware."

"And if it is?"

"There's some writing scratched on it, and he says it's for you, and he ain't going to give it to nobody but you, as he says, sir." Oxwich's imitations of popular dialect were apt to be somewhat stiff.

"Who is the man?"

"He's a waterman, Sir Anthony. Something to do with the Thames, I believe."

"Devilish odd, isn't it?"

DOUBLOONS

"I should venture respectfully to advise you to see him, sir," Oxwich coughed.

The man was brought into the presence.

He was a fat person. His blue suit and silver buttons would have shown to the expert that he was in the employ of the State — outdoor section of the Customs department; and his easy demeanor sufficed to prove that he was a freeman of the Waterman's Company. He carried under his arm, imperfectly enveloped in a portion of the "Pink 'Un," a salver, or platter, of some metal resembling silver.

"Morning, sir," he said, gently swinging his hat. "I found this in my boat this morning. I come up here at once, all the way from Poplar, and it'll cost me half a day's work beside train fare and cab fare, three and a penny, sir. I found it at half-past seven — tide at half-ebb."

And he handed the salver to Tony.

"You'll see there's something scratched on it, sir," he added.

The salver was bent across the middle. Tony turned it round, and gradually deciphered the following words, which had been faintly scratched on it, partly in Roman letters and partly in script, by means of some sharp instrument:

Take this Sir Anthony Didring Devonshire Mansion London will reward
am captured I think destination Grand Etang but

That was all.

Tony muttered the message aloud several times, examined every inch of the salver in a kind of dazed manner, and then passed it to Oxwich, who, flattered, directed upon it the entire force of his intellect.

"Well?" Tony questioned.

DOUBLOONS

"One must put a full stop after 'London,' another after 'reward,' and another after 'captured,'" Oxwich decided. "The writer was interrupted."

"But —"

"Mr. Masters, sir."

"You think so?"

"Without a doubt, sir."

"So do I. But Grand Etang — what does that mean?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps this person can tell us."

"What is Grand Etang, my man?" Tony asked the waterman.

He possibly objected to being Tony's man, or Oxwich's person, and saw in the terms an insult to the honorable company to which he belonged. At any rate, he replied distantly:

"Don't ask *me*, sir."

"Where do you say you found the thing?"

"I say I found it in my boat, sir."

"And where was your boat?"

"My boat was lying off Green's Wharf, Poplar, sir."

"Had it been there long?"

"All night, sir."

"Perhaps I had better make a note of this person's statements, sir," Oxwich whispered dramatically, and his master nodded. Oxwich carried a note-book like a policeman, and like a policeman he drew it out. Only the word "reward" scratched on the platter prevented the waterman from violently protesting.

"And you went to your boat at half-past seven this morning?"

"Yes, sir. At half-past seven."

DOUBLOONS

"And the platter was lying in the boat?"

"It was lying in the stern-sheets against the tiller."

"You might ask him what time he left the boat last night, sir?" Oxwich murmured.

"I was just going to. What time did you leave your boat last night, my man?"

"I didn't leave it last night. I left it at one o'clock this morning."

"So that someone must have put the platter in your boat between one o'clock and 7:30 this morning?"

"You may reckon it out like that, sir."

"You've no idea who put it in?"

"No more than you, sir, or 'im." And the waterman jerked his head toward Oxwich.

"It might have been dropped in from the wharf, eh?"

"Or from a passing ship," Oxwich whispered.

The waterman smiled.

"Could it have been dropped in from a passing ship?" asked Tony.

"What! Into a boat tied up to a wharf? You ain't got to think as a ship is a blessed hansom cab as goes about grazing lamp-posts and corners. No! There was, howsumever, a ship a-lying off the wharf, and my boat was alongside of her, between her and the wharf, sir."

"Then do you think the platter was dropped off that ship into your boat?"

"I never think about things as ain't my affair; it don't pay in the Customs. But I don't say as that platter wasn't dropped out o' that ship."

DOUBLOONS

"If I may offer a remark, sir," Oxwich put in, "the salver was more probably dropped from the ship than from the wharf. Assuming the gentleman who wished the salver to reach you to have been on the wharf, why should he have chosen to drop it into a boat? He was on dry land, and could have done all sorts of things. Whereas if he was on the ship his choice was limited — in fact, strictly limited."

"Moreover," said the waterman, "I don't say as the port-holes o' that there ship weren't pretty small, and I don't say as a man mightn't have bent this platter, as it is bent, to shove it through one of them port-holes. If he did, he had a fist on 'im, he 'ad."

"And Mr. Masters was possessed of exceptional physical force, sir," added Oxwich.

"It is plain," said Tony, astounded by his own penetration, "that the platter was dropped off the ship into your boat."

"Especially as it's a ship's platter," said the boatman.

"The ship is still there?" Tony resumed his examination.

"If she is she's put back," the waterman replied. "She cast off at five o'clock this morning, accordin' to what I'm told."

"What kind of ship was she?"

"She wasn't no kind of a ship to speak of, sir. No class. She was an old tub as called herself a steam-yacht. Belfast built, about three hundred ton. Been on hire in Westerton's yard for two year and more."

"What is her name?"

"The 'White Rose,' sir."

"Then someone has hired her recently?"

DOUBLOONS

"Or bought her. There's fools enough on Thames side, Gawd knows!"

"You don't know who?"

"I don't know nothing more, sir. And if it's all the same to you, I must be going, sir. I've got to sign on at noon. And if the party as is scribbling wants my name he can have it, *and* address." He touched his forehead to Tony, anticipatorily.

"Well, my man, here's a sovereign for your trouble," said the baronet, after the waterman had imparted the details of his identity.

"Thank you, sir," said the waterman gloomily. "That'll leave me sixteen and eleven, not to mention as there's my fares back again. Say fifteen shillings for me when all's paid. Well —"

Tony was of an extremely generous disposition. He saw at once that, having regard to the peculiarity of the case, he had perhaps not been too lavish in this instance; but, like most generous people, he was rendered utterly hard by an accusation of stinginess. He stared at the waterman in haughty silence.

"Why, the platter's worth that," muttered the waterman, disilluminated. "And a 'Sir,' too!"

"Oxwich," said Sir Anthony, when the man had gone, "we must find out what Grand Etang means."

"Yes, sir. It is evidently the name of a place, and it sounds French. 'Grand' certainly means great, sir."

"Obviously, and I fancy that 'Etang' means a pond or something of that kind. Bring me the Encyclopaedia Britannica—that will tell us everything."

DOUBLOONS

"Pardon me, sir. You forget. You instructed me to sell the Encyclopaedia Britannica some months ago — hat day when you were looking up 'bicycle,' and found the mile record given as three minutes. You said work was out of date."

"Whom did you sell it to?"

"To myself, sir."

"Where is it?"

"Up-stairs in my room. A supplement has been issued, which I propose to buy as soon as I can."

"Lend it me, will you?"

"With pleasure, sir."

In five minutes master and man were knee deep in the stout volumes. But they discovered nothing. In vain Oxwich read out the index: "Grand Duke, Grande Chartreuse, Grande Ronde, Grandfather's chair, Grand Haven, Grandimontanes." In vain Sir Anthony ransacked the volumes G. and E. Everything was grand in the Encyclopaedia Britannica except étang.

The searchers arose from the floor disheartened.

"Look here, Oxwich," said Sir Anthony. "Here we are, in the middle of London, and we want to know where Grand Etang is, and we can't! The idea is ridiculous!"

"I have a friend who has the Times Atlas, sir."

"Then get it, for Heaven's sake."

While Oxwich went to obtain the "Atlas," Sir Anthony sent another servant with his compliments to the Manager of the Mansion, and could the Manager of the Mansion inform Sir Anthony where Grand Etang was. The Manager of the

DOUBLOONS

Mansion, however, could not, but he promised vaguely to move in the matter. Then Oxwich returned, perusing the index of the Atlas as he walked. He triumphed at the very instant of reëntering the room. There were two Grand Etangs in the index of the Atlas. But the triumph of Oxwich was brief, for both the Grand Etangs proved to be little spots in France — places to which not even an old tub of three hundred tons could possibly voyage.

“Oxwich,” said Sir Anthony, finally, “you must go up to the British Museum.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Oxwich in a voice of desperation.

At that moment Mrs. Appleby and her son Horace entered. Oxwich having been torn from his duties to the pursuit of learning, these visitors had been allowed to come in without ceremony or precautions.

“We’ve come early, so as to spend the day with you, darling,” said Mrs. Appleby.

Sir Anthony stared desolately at the arrival.

“Where is Grand Etang, sonny?” he demanded abruptly of Horace.

“Grand Etang? It’s something in Grenada, uncle,” answered the surprising child without the least hesitation, thus justifying his mother’s estimate of his erudition. “It’s either a mountain or a valley or a river, or something of that kind. We had the West Indies last week in geography.”

Sir Anthony precipitated himself upon the volumes containing G, and sought Grenada. Yes, surely, Grand Etang was there! Though given neither as a mountain nor a valley, nor a river, but as an inland lake, it was indubitably there!

DOUBLOONS

It had lurked hidden laughing at them in the Encyclopaedia Britannica all the morning, and its discovery was due to Horace alone.

“Oh, that’s it! That’s *it* right enough!” said Sir Anthony, addressing Oxwich. “You remember the talk about the West Indies at the inquest? That’s it.”

“Then I needn’t go to the British Museum, sir?”

“No.”

It was a moment of unique pride for the mother of the astonishing Horace, who had made the British Museum unnecessary. Horace pulled a peppermint out of his pocket and ate it boldly. He also looked at the cigarette cabinet. He had earned the right to do both these daring deeds.

“Thank you, Oxwich,” Sir Anthony murmured.

Oxwich bowed, and was departing when the door reopened, and another visitor was shown in, still without any of the Oxwichian precautions. It was a veiled woman, who raised her veil as she entered. Oxwich himself blanched.

“You!” Sir Anthony exclaimed, staggered.

And Mary Pollexfen nodded. She sank into a chair and turned very pale.

Mrs. Appleby rose.

“Tony,” said Mrs. Appleby. “This lady seems ill. Shall I —”

“No thanks,” said Mary Pollexfen; “I shall be all right in a moment.”

“Tony,” said Mrs. Appleby, with meaning. Her countenance was an exhibition of the most violent curiosity.

“Tony!” she repeated.

DOUBLOONS

“Miss Giralda,” Sir Anthony stammered, “let me make you acquainted with my sister, Mrs. Appleby. Mildred, this is Miss Giralda. No doubt you have heard her name.”

Mrs. Appleby, having thus by accident impinged upon the more romantic side of her brother’s existence, grew fluffier than ever. “Charmed,” she said. “Are you *quite* sure you are not ill?”

XIX

MRS. APPLEBY AS MACHIAVELLI

“**W**HY,” asked Mrs. Appleby, with an air of simplicity, “Why don’t you go after the ‘White Rose’?”

This observation will by itself show how far that woman’s invincible curiosity and talent for arranging the affairs of other people had carried her in the space of a few hours. She and Mary Pollexfen and Sir Anthony sat together in Sir Anthony’s drawing-room after tea. Horace, having made friends with one of the lift-boys, was amusing himself at varying altitudes of the Devonshire Mansion. Much had passed since the arrival of the two ladies in the morning. Mrs. Appleby, not at all displeased to become acquainted with a stage celebrity of the first order, had behaved to Mary Pollexfen with marked tact. She had, moreover, been considerably impressed by Mary’s clothes and Mary’s manner. And Mary, on the other hand, was really thankful to have Mrs. Appleby present at the interview with the baronet — that baronet whom she had so often and so coldly rebuffed, but of whom she despised nothing but his intelligence.

Mary’s narrative of the events of the previous day, given to Sir Anthony and Mrs. Appleby in conclave (Mrs. Appleby had no intention of being kept out of anything), had stimulated

DOUBLOONS

the baronet's sluggish imagination. He had passed through the stages of amazement, admiration, envy, and he was now at the stage of emulation. The wonderful romantic things that Mary Pollexfen and Philip Masters had done begot in him a desire to do things equally wonderful himself. That Mary had lived for many days in the Corner House as a man startled him; it startled him, indeed, more than it startled his sister, who, like most women of irreproachable correctness, was incapable, really, of being shocked; Mrs. Appleby had not pretended even to be startled.

Philip's rash disappearance into Poplar, and his mysterious capture, and the strange message, each contributed to throw new light on existence for Tony. He would have thought such occurrences impossible had he merely read of them; but now, with the bent platter on his mantelpiece, he went to the other extreme and thought them entirely natural, and began to fancy that life was made up of similar episodes. Despite protests, he had rushed off with Oxwich in the motor-car to Poplar before lunch. But he had discovered naught, the widow Upottery having, of course, contrived not to leave behind her tracks crude enough to be perceived by the Sir Anthonys of this world. He had also run to earth the owner of the 'White Rose,' who had nothing to tell him, save that the yacht had been chartered by an individual named Smythe, whose address was the General Post-Office. He had, further, communicated with the police, and the police had received him coldly and incredulously, promising, without enthusiasm, to examine his report in due course. The police being aware that Philip had turned journalist, and not having gathered

DOUBLOONS

much comfort from his article in the morning's *Courier*, were scarcely disposed to put themselves about because he had vanished, or, as they hinted, pretended to vanish.

"Go after him, eh?" said Sir Anthony, jumping up from the sofa. "That's an idea. Something's certainly got to be done. What's the name of the line that runs to the West Indies? Royal Mail, isn't it? I'll ring for Oxwich." And he rang. Oxwich entered instantly; the man was never far from the door during a crisis. "Oxwich, telephone to the Royal Mail Line offices, and find out when the next steamer goes to the West Indies."

"I have already found out, Sir Anthony," replied Oxwich. "There is a complete list of steamship sailings down-stairs. Next Saturday week, sir. A boat left Southampton only the day before yesterday."

"Thank you."

Oxwich withdrew, having added another atom to the coral reef of his reputation.

"That's nearly a fortnight," said Sir Anthony, dashed.

"But you can hire a yacht, dear," said Mrs. Appleby, imperturbably smoothing out the flounces of her striking dress.

"Can I?"

"Why, of course, dearest! And in a yacht you can go where you like."

"How do you hire yachts?" Tony demanded, his imagination getting a new fillip.

"I — I don't know," said Mrs. Appleby. "You just hire them. I expect it's quite simple — like hiring a salmon river

DOUBLOONS

or a moor or a special train. I dare say you could hire a nice large yacht! One that nobody would be seasick on. I don't mean one of those sailing things. I mean a steam-yacht, with electric light, and a cow on board."

Sir Anthony rang once more.

"Oxwich," he said, "get me Kelly's Directory from somewhere. I want the names and addresses of some yacht brokers."

"Yes, sir," Oxwich agreed, and then, after a majestic pause: "perhaps one of the yachting newspapers might be more useful, sir."

"Just so, exactly."

"That man of yours is a pearl," Mrs. Appleby observed.

"He understands me," Tony agreed nonchalantly.

And presently the baronet was reading aloud from the *Yachting World* :

650 ton (about) steel steam-yacht built 189 — to Lloyd's highest class. Length W. L. 202 feet, beam 26 feet, draught 14½ feet. Every convenience and comfort. Large shade-deck, drawing-room, dining-room, and smoking-room on main deck, with intercommunication. Eight state-rooms, electric light, steam heating, steam steering-gear; steam-launch, speed up to 13 knots, recently passed special survey. Exceptionally well found. Suitable for long voyages. Ample bunker capacity. Ready at once. Lying Tilbury. Price very low, a bargain. Also for charter. Sole Agents, Boyds, Malincourt House, Piccadilly, W. National Telephone 6969 Gerrard.

"It is precisely what you need, dearest," said Mrs. Appleby, "if only it has a pretty name."

"Miss Pollexfen," Tony burst out suddenly, dropping the paper, "you do not say anything."

"I — I — what am I to say?" Mary murmured.

"You see," Mrs. Appleby added quickly, in a matter-of-fact tone, unable any longer to keep her cards off the table,

DOUBLOONS

"Horace and I could go with you, to keep you company. The voyage would be such a good thing for Horace. And, besides his health, it would be such an education for him, wouldn't it?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tony, who found himself still receiving shocks.

And Mrs. Appleby calmly continued:

"Miss Pollexfen might also go, as our guest. I am sure you must be very solicitous, dear Miss Pollexfen, about the fate of this brave young man who is running such risks on your behalf."

Mrs. Appleby's spirit of enterprise was breath-taking. It brought a blush to Mary's cheek, but no words to Mary's tongue.

"And there's another point," proceeded Mrs. Appleby. "If Miss Pollexfen stays in England, her whereabouts are certain to become known, and she would be worried to death by detectives and things."

"Miss Pollexfen," Tony asked her, "what do you say?"

"It is extremely kind of you," Mary managed to reply. "I don't know what to —"

Tony nerved himself.

"It depends on you," he said.

"If it depends on me," she answered in a new, firm voice, with a decisive gesture, "I will go."

Tony rang the bell.

"Oxwich, put me on to 6969 Gerrard."

When he came back from telephoning, Mary Pollexfen was alone in the drawing-room, Mrs. Appleby having departed to convey delicious possibilities to her offspring.

DOUBLOONS

"I'm going down to see Boyds at once," said Tony, flushed with his own importance. The potentialities of a fortune of four hundred thousand pounds had been more fully than ever revealed to the young man that afternoon. A steam-yacht! It seemed strange to him that the sublime notion of a steam-yacht had never before crossed his mind. He was drunk with the scheme.

Mary stood up. "You are very, very good," she replied, with deep feeling.

And suddenly the atmosphere changed for Tony. The fact that Philip Masters was in actual, veritable danger became intensely real to him.

"Not at all. You know Phil is a great pal of mine."

"And supposing you go — we go, what shall you do when you get out there, to Grenada?"

"That will depend. We may have to consult the local police."

"I hope nothing terrible will happen," Mary breathed.

"Why do you imagine such things?"

"Because I have been thinking there may be something in that hidden treasure story of the negro Coco's after all. And if money is concerned — and my uncle —" she stopped.

"Do you know," cried Tony, "that's just what I've been thinking — I mean about the treasure. As for risks; how can there be any risks? Why Phil should be carried off to a place like Grenada, I can't imagine. But we'll find him. I tell you what — it wouldn't be a bad plan to get hold of Marse Coco and hear him talk, eh?"

"I should like to very much," Mary answered. "He was

DOUBLOONS

my poor father's friend, the only friend he had, I think." The voice almost broke.

And Tony, as he called briskly for his hat and overcoat, had a vague sense of the grim quality of the whole adventure. And he perceived Mary as a tragic and remote figure, far above, not for him, in a sphere of emotions utterly different from his. Such simple, vain, good-natured men have at times such glimpses.

XX

TRAVELS IN LONDON

AFTER quitting Mary Pollexfen in Kingsway. Philip Masters did not reach Poplar on the Sunday evening without a considerable amount of difficulty. Like many Londoners, he knew not his London. He had probably never in his life been further East than Aldgate; it is doubtful if he even knew the Three Nuns. He hailed a hansom just north of St. Clement Dane's, and remarked airily to the cabman:

"Cotton Street, Poplar, No. 7."

The "No. 7" was delicious.

"Not me!" said the cabman.

"What's it worth?" Philip inquired, trying to look generous.

"It ain't worth anything," the cabman replied. "I'm not going to Poplar to-night, guv'nor. I'll drive ye to Aldgate if ye like."

Philip accepted. At Aldgate, where he already felt himself in a foreign land, or rather in a hostile country strongly held by the enemy, where he didn't know even the exterior of the churches, where the streets were full of trams instead of crawling cabs, it was with a certain sinking of the heart that he saw his own vehicle vanish. He ought to have been content with a tram, but he lacked skill in the lore of London travel,

DOUBLOONS

and loitered about for another hansom. Fortune favored him.

"Cotton Street, Poplar," he said to the driver, wisely leaving out the "No. 7" on this occasion.

And to his despair and disgust the cabman replied

"Not me, guv'nor!"

"It isn't far, is it?" Philip questioned somewhat wistfully.

"It's further than I'm a-going this blessed night," said the cabman. "I'll take you to Stepney Station, if you like. That's just in the radius."

Once more Philip accepted.

The cab penetrated further and further into regions Caesar never knew. It followed a thoroughfare wider than anything Philip had seen outside Paris, but as regards its characteristics ineffably depressing. And the thoroughfare was eternal. Time after time it had the air of reaching the end of the world, and then it made up its mind to proceed further. Philip had not beheld in thirty years as many sad-eyed, ill-dressed, plain people as passed the windows of the cab in thirty minutes. There were plenty of public-houses, all resembling each other so exactly that they might have been bought at some wholesale store of public-houses and put down there at regular intervals, signs and everything complete; but there was not a single decent restaurant — using the word "decent" in Philip's sense; nor a single building that met his eye in a friendly manner.

Then the mean lights of Stepney Station appeared, and Philip was obliged to descend again unprotected into the hostile country. He was geographically so lost that he knew

DOUBLOONS

not east from west. He had heard of Stepney chiefly as a district owning a bishop! He might have been in Strasburg, Staffa, or Stornoway.

"How do I go on from here?" he asked the cabman respectfully.

And the cabman looked down on him from his box.

"Any of these trams," said the cabman. "I don't know as they goes to Cotton Street, but they goes to Poplar."

"Is it much further?"

"I should say it's a tidy step."

He boarded a tram which he ought to have boarded at Aldgate.

The conductor actually knew Cotton Street, and Philip, enheartened, regarded him as a man and a brother. The tram was a leisurely apparatus. The entire populations of Stepney and Poplar seemed to get in and out of it about three times. It passed churches and manufactories. It crossed water by means of bridges, and Philip saw the masts of ships dimly against the night sky. He also saw, now and then, when the tram stopped, posters on the walls in languages of which he could not make out a single character. Then the tram drew up at another large railway station, and a couple of hundred yards further on the conductor tipped him a familiar wink.

"'Ere y'are!" said the conductor.

And Philip had to descend, had to leave his sole acquaintance in that desolate region. The strange Oriental odor of the tram remained with him.

Just as he had heard of Stepney, so he had heard of Poplar,

DOUBLOONS

and he was in it. His own London seemed to be in another hemisphere. Close by was a curious church, and its clock struck twelve just as Philip was hesitating at the corner of East India Dock Road and Cotton Street.

He remembered that Giralda, too, had been down there, all alone, and he whistled in order to create in himself a feeling of manliness. In less than a minute he stood in front of No. 7. So far as he could judge in the obscurity of the badly-lit street, it was a house unutterably mean and melancholy. A light was burning in the hall, as a light had been burning in the hall of the Corner House on just such an evening. He went up the two steps and knocked loud and bold.

A rather short, firmly-built man opened the door.

"I want to see Mrs. Upottery," Philip said at once. He had no intention of raising the point whether or not Mrs. Upottery lived there, or had lived there.

The man seemed to hesitate.

"Mrs. Upottery?" he murmured in a thick, heavy voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Upottery."

"We don't want any friends of Mrs. Upottery here," said the man in a tone of finality. "A nice time of night to come waking people up."

"I'm not a friend of Mrs. Upottery, mate," Philip protested, "But I've got to speak to her."

"Well, she ain't in."

"When will she be in?"

"She won't be in. At least, I hope not. She's turned this house upside down. She's made forty times more mess than she's worth. And she ain't paid her bill properly. If my mother

DOUBLOONS

had her here, she'd claw her blooming eyes out for her, that's what she'd do, and quick!"

The man was furious against Mrs. Upottery. He made as if to close the door, but Philip put his foot in it, at the same time holding out half-a-crown, which glinted in the feeble light.

"See here, mate," said he persuasively, "if that's any use to you, it's yours. I'd like to have a bit of a chat with you; I sha'n't keep you two minutes. But I've got most particular reasons for meeting with Mrs. Upottery, and I'm no more a friend of hers than you are."

The man's hand fidgetted toward the half-crown, and then his fingers closed on it, and he opened the door wider. Without waiting for an invitation Philip slipped inside the house. A candle burned crookedly in a pewter stick on a deal table. The sides of the passage were shiny with grease, and the floor was of no special color or substance. Philip's eyes interrogated the man's. He was shabbily dressed, but not extremely so. He wore a cap, and a leathern belt showed under his waistcoat. His face was pale. At first he gave the impression of being young, but this impression passed; he might have been almost any age.

"What do you want to know?" he asked gruffly.

"You say Mrs. Upottery's been kicking up a dust here. What about?"

"How do I know what about? I only know as she's going as stewardess or something on a yacht. But if you ask me, she's a queer lot. What surprises me is that the police ain't been after her. If she ain't a gaolbird, then I never seen one. And I seen a few, too."

DOUBLOONS

“A yacht?”

“Yes. I did hear as she was bound for the West Indies — Grenada — Grand Etang — damned if I can rec’lect the names. But the old woman’s been jabbering about Grand Etang ever since she came in to-night?”

Philip was immensely interested.

“Where is she now?”

“She’s gone down to the yacht with her bundle.”

“Where’s the yacht?”

“She’s lying off Green’s Wharf, if she hasn’t sailed.”

Philip thought a moment.

“Far from here?” he questioned.

“No, not that far.”

“If you’ll come out and take me there at once,” said Philip, feeling in his pocket, “there’s five shillings for you.”

“I’ll do it,” said the man promptly. “Come on.”

They went outside instantly, and the man banged the door. He led the way down Cotton Street, Philip following. They crossed Poplar High Street, and soon Philip found himself blundering over lines of railway amid little groups of loaded wagons with a red signal here and there in the distance. The man walked fast, and never looked behind. The route lay over uneven ground: all was strange, exotic, and full of sinister romance. Then some sheds loomed up, and a warehouse. The man passed along an entry lighted by an oil lamp.

“Look out,” he said at last.

Philip saw lights. He stood on a wharf. The vast and heaving Thames lay astonishingly before him with the shipping of the world on its broad bosom. Two steamers were alongside,

DOUBLOONS

and into one of them a steam crane, with an incredible thunderous rattle and screech, was pouring bulky packages. Men cried to one another between the ship and the wharf. Philip's guide walked up the wharf to a long sloping gangway that gave access to the other steamer. Philip observed the name "White Rose" on a dirty gray life-buoy. A thin smoke was oozing from the funnel. A solitary lantern showed from a mast. The guide crossed the gangway, Philip at his heels. And as Philip gained the deck of the mysterious steamer he paused a moment to take in the scene, with its wide water, its tarry, oily odor of ships, its gliding spectral lights, and its weird sounds. The very air smelt of the sea. This was London! This was the city of Piccadilly Circus, and the Alcazar, and the Devonshire Mansion!

"Down here," the man called, indicating a companion ladder, and standing back for Philip to pass.

Philip remembered descending the ladder, but he remembered nothing else for quite a long time.

XXI

UNCLE WALTER MANAGES BETTER

WHEN his senses became once more available for the uses of his existence, he was at first aware of nothing except a feeling of fatigue and petulance.

It seemed to him that he was like a cross and sickly child who had a comprehensive quarrel with the universe. Then he began to notice other interesting things, as that he was lying on his back on some soft substance, and that there was a small circle of faint radiance in front of him to his right. He tried lazily to move his arms, and he could not; then his legs, and he could not. Then he renewed the attempt with increased force, still without result. This made him angry. He struggled hard, was conscious of pain in his ankles and wrists, and muttered:

“I’m tied down.”

Thenceforward his memory recovered itself very rapidly. He recalled all that had passed up to the moment of descending the companion. He put two and two ingeniously together, despite a wandering pain in his head. The thought flashed through his brain like a scientific discovery that classifies and explains a whole series of differing facts:

“Uncle Pollexfen’s at the bottom of this.”

And shortly afterwards he said aloud:

“Well, I’m dashed!”

DOUBLOONS

His eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom, and he gradually perceived that he was in a cabin, and that the circle of faint light was a port-hole. He thought of Mary Pollexfen, far off in another London, with intense and violent longing. And he thought of the *Courier* and Lord Nasing, expecting the wonderful "copy" which he was to provide.

From time to time he made efforts to free his limbs; in vain.

He heard a key turn in a lock. The door of the cabin opened. A lighted match came into the cabin, followed by a man. Philip's eyes blinked. The man approached a hanging lamp, carefully and deliberately lit it, blew out the match, dropped it on the floor, and turned to examine the prisoner. It was the man of No. 7, Cotton Street, the man who had led him, who had lured him, on board the yacht!

Philip made no sign, though his brain was working at a high rate of speed. His temperamental calm always served him well in a crisis. He had fully grasped the futility of any kind of protest, and he was determined to wait. The man, with an air of cheerful, bland interest, bent over the bunk on which Philip lay.

"H'm!" he murmured, rather in the style of a doctor.

Then he picked up a black bonnet which was lying near, put it on, gave a twist to his mouth, and winked. The sudden resemblance to Mrs. Upottery was too remarkable to leave any doubt in Philip's mind. He was bound and helpless in the presence of Walter Pollexfen, that protean being who, hitherto unrecognized in his proper person, dominated the extraordinary drama of the Corner House.

DOUBLOONS

"Thanks for the three half-crowns. I managed it somewhat better this time," said the man softly.

"What?" Philip curtly asked. It struck him that the man had changed completely. He now spoke with a highly-cultivated accent, in a tone that was even more than pleasant. If, indeed, he was Mary's uncle, Mary's lovely voice was not the first of its sort in her family.

"The insensibility business," answered the man. "A few days ago I thought my hand had lost its cunning. It needs a blow of just sufficient strength, neither too strong nor too feeble, in just the right place."

"Are you Walter Pollexfen?" Philip asked, ignoring these observations.

"Mr. Masters," said the man, "I have come to satisfy your legitimate curiosity. I am Walter Pollexfen. We have had the pleasure of meeting several times already."

He smiled vaguely.

"I wish you'd unfasten these ropes," Philip said. "You've not been quite nice to me, you know."

Mr. Pollexfen responded:

"There is a French proverb about the indiscretion of putting one's finger between the tree and its bark. You committed that indiscretion. It is ridiculous to gird against the consequences of having flown in the face of a proverb, my dear sir. However, I am willing to release you. First let me direct your attention to this revolver, and this knife." He drew Philip's revolver and Philip's penknife from his own pockets. "I will release your legs first, then your left arm, and then your right. Having done that, I shall retreat rapidly to the opposite

DOUBLOONS

corner of the cabin, and if you move off the bunk you will be translated direct to Heaven. I mention this because I have an objection to your Jiu-Jitsu tricks. It was a lamentable fault in my program that while I was in Yokohama I neglected to study Jiu-Jitsu myself. Do you understand what I have said?"

"Perfectly," said Philip. "Go ahead."

"Your manners please me," Pollexfen remarked as he cut the cord.

"I can't return the compliment," said Philip.

In another moment he was free, while Pollexfen stood at the opposite end of the cabin, the revolver in one hand, and the penknife and a tangle of cord in the other. He wondered whether it would be better to make a dash at the scoundrel instantly, or to await events. Having reflected upon Pollexfen's previous exploits, and upon the kind of person that the hero of them must necessarily be, he decided that in all the circumstances it would be better to await events.

"Perhaps," he ventured, stretching and twisting his legs, and rubbing his wrists, "you'll explain what's the meaning of this foolery with me. It looks to me as much like a theatrical display as anything."

"Certainly I will tell you," replied Pollexfen. "Have I not said that I am here to satisfy your legitimate curiosity? As for the present scene, it is, in fact, rather like a theatrical display. You see, I'm a theatrical person — kindly lie down on that bunk — and I've had no one to talk to intimately for a long, long time. I feel the need of talking to someone, the need of boasting, if you will. It's in my nature. It's in the nature of most great men. And I suppose you'll not deny,

DOUBLOONS

seeing how much you yourself have discovered about me, that I am a great man. Besides, you deserve that your audacious curiosity should be appeased. I might have killed you at once."

"It surprises me that you didn't," Philip put in. "A murder or so, more or less, especially when one has murdered one's own brother."

"I'm bound to tell you," said Pollexfen, "that I didn't, morally, murder my brother. I only meant to stun him. Unhappily, I hit too hard — and there the old chap was, dead at my feet."

"What did you hit him with?"

"This," said Pollexfen, putting the penknife and cord in his pocket and drawing therefrom a small pear-shaped bag enclosed in a long, narrow net. "It contains a mixture of the smallest shot and silver sand. Shot alone would be too heavy, and sand wouldn't be heavy enough in such a small quantity. It's an instrument of attack affected by the hooligans of Lima, where I met with it — on the back of my neck. I daresay you feel a slight soreness at the back of *your* neck."

"I do."

"Just so. I can assure you I was very awkwardly placed with my brother's corpse. No doubt everyone thought the affair a miracle of prearrangement. It wasn't. But if I am not equal to emergencies I am nothing. I never embark on any difficult enterprise without a ladder of silk rope. I changed into male attire. Then I descended by means of that ladder from my brother's room into Little Girdlers Alley, and I reconnoitered. The watchman was my first annoyance; I

DOUBLOONS

chatted with him and found out all about his domestic affairs. I then went up into Holborn, discovered a naughty boy at a coffee-stall in Theobald's Road, and persuaded him that there was an excellent practical joke to be played on that watchman. The joke worked to perfection, except that you came along and spoilt the desired effect. However, you went to sleep. Then I wanted a spade. There was a spade propped up against your cabin. I adopted it. I dug a neat thing in graves. Then I climbed back to my brother's room, and lowered him gently to the ground, and followed after. As soon as he was buried I put the spade back, and revisited the trench just as that idiot of a policeman came up. I was back in the house in no time. The affair seemed to me rather distinguished, both in conception and in execution. What do you think?"

The man spoke to such easy, unaffected tones that Philip, do what he would, could not retain the ordinary human attitude toward what could only be called, if English words were to retain their common meaning, a dastardly crime.

"I think you succeeded by mere chance," he said coldly and nonchalantly. Sweat broke out on his brow, and he knew it not.

"You do not express yourself accurately," Pollexfen protested. "You mean, or you ought to mean, that I succeeded by a masterly use of chance."

"It's all very well to say that the affair was an accident," said Philip; "I have my own ideas about that."

"You doubt me, my dear sir?" Pollexfen seemed surprised and hurt.

DOUBLOONS

"If it was an accident, how came you to drug young Meredith on the very night that the accident occurred?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Pollexfen. "I see what you are running your head against. That was quite another matter. I did not understand young Meredith, as you call that charming person. But I had my suspicions. Young Meredith had behaved for several days in a way that I did not at all care for. So I determined to investigate the case of young Meredith, and for that purpose I caused a drug to be employed. However, I was so fully occupied during the night that I had no opportunity to profit by the effect of the drug till morning, and even then I was hurried. Still, I accomplished enough."

"You accomplished too much," Philip said.

"How so?"

"You lifted the blind of Meredith's room at a moment when I was watching from the street. It was just that that started me in my investigation."

"Then I certainly accomplished too much — for your ultimate welfare, Mr. Masters." He appeared to reflect. "Nevertheless, the fact remains both interesting and instructive. I ought not to have given way to my curiosity so far as to lift that blind. Did I lift it in a peculiar manner?"

"You lifted it as a man who has killed his own brother might have been expected to lift it," Philip answered coldly. And he thought: "My ultimate welfare! What the deuce does he mean?"

"Excellent young man," said Pollexfen, waving the revolver with a didactic gesture. "As a philosopher you have already attained to no mean proficiency. But you have

DOUBLOONS

something to learn. The absurd conventional emphasis which you put on the phrase 'own brother' convinces me that you have something to learn. One does not choose one's relatives. Forgive this platitude. But one does not. One owes nothing to one's brother. One's brother is a mere hazard of life — of no logical consequence whatever. My brother was one man I was another. Hence fratricide is no worse, and no better (save in exceptional instances), than ordinary homicide. In truth, just as there is no Allah but Allah, so there is no homicide but homicide. In the peculiar example of homicide now before us, I did a kindness to my brother. I claim no virtue for that — it was an accident. My brother was old, feeble, embittered. He had no friends. He had quarreled even with his only child. He was about to voyage in an enterprise in which he would assuredly have failed. He would have lost all his money in it. His last days would have been unspeakably sad. An accident — my clumsiness — saved him all that. And you would like to see me hanged for what I did! You astound me. You shock me. Let me tell you —"

Pollexfen broke off suddenly. A throb went through the vessel. It was the beat of the engines.

"What in the name of Lucifer!" he burst out, evidently startled.

Keeping the muzzle of the revolver in Philip's direction he moved cautiously but quickly to the door and opened it.

"Don't try any games," he warned his prisoner with a menacing accent, and went out and shut and locked the door. The beat of the engines ceased.

Philip leaped from the bunk, making straight for the port-

DOUBLOONS

hole. With difficulty he unscrewed its fastening and opened it and looked forth. The loading of the other steamer was now finished, and not a soul was on the wharf. He called in a low voice—he dared not make much noise; there was no answer. Below him lay a broad flat-bottomed pair-oar. It was moored to the wharf, and as it swayed to and fro its painter alternately fell into the water and rose dripping; and the sound of hundreds of drops pattering on the black surface of the river each time the painter rose was strangely clear and uncanny in the night.

A notion came to Philip.

He examined his pockets. They had been emptied. He searched the cabin for suitable material, and found nothing but a salver that was reared up on the top of the mahogany erection by the bunk. He opened the mahogany erection, which, in a space of three cubic feet, contained—with its drawers, and apertures, and taps, and basins, and hooks—the conveniences of an entire house. He cursed, as philosophers will in their moments of frustration. And then, while staring at the interior of an empty drawer (lined with newspaper) he perceived that the screw of the brass knob projected through the front of the drawer and was secured on the inside by a nut.

He detached the knob, and with the sharp screw-end of it he began to scratch a message on the salver.

He was interrupted by a knock at the door.

He rushed again to the port-hole and tried to put the salver through it. But as its circumference was greater than the circumference of the port-hole, immutable Euclid was against

DOUBLOONS

him. In a frenzy of rage he bent the salver across his knee. It would just slip through the hole. He let it fall into the boat, and it descended softly on to the neatly-coiled tiller ropes.

The knock was repeated.

Making no answer Philip rapidly fastened the port-hole.

"I say!" — the voice was Pollexfen's — "Are you lying on the bunk?"

"No, I'm not."

"Well, kindly lie down on the bunk. I'm coming in."

Philip obeyed. By stretching out his hand he could screw the knob home in its drawer.

"I'm on the bunk," said he.

"Well, on the whole I sha'n't trust you."

There was silence. Then Philip heard the boring of an instrument in the door, and presently an inch-wide gouge came through at the height of a man's eye and was withdrawn. An eye took the place of the gouge, and roved over the cabin.

"When I say I'm on the bunk, I'm on the bunk," Philip observed.

"So I see," answered Pollexfen. "But I preferred to see."

He reëntered, making prominent the revolver. "To resume," he said.

XXII

THE COMPACT

“**W**HAT are you leading up to?” Philip asked.
“That’s what I want to know.”

“I resume,” said Pollexfen, ignoring this definite question. “I got the information that I required out of the late Captain’s pockets. It was quite as good as I expected, and it quite confirmed my view that he could not have used it successfully himself. I now had various matters to attend to all at once. I had to pretend to be ill, for reasons of discretion. And your unfortunate discovery of that tooth out of my comb made it necessary for me to appear at the inquest. I think my appearance at the inquest was rather masterly, don’t you, Mr. Masters? In the pleasure it gave me, it rivaled my finest triumphs at the Britannia, Hoxton, and Ford’s Opera House in Denver. It was, not to exaggerate, immense. You may be interested to know that the Captain knew who I was before he died. I had an interview with him in his room — stormy; in fact, pugilistic. The comb must have got broken then. I had meant simply to steal the few trifling documents that I needed, but I failed in that. The Captain was too suspicious. Hence the ultimate altercation. Of course, it ended badly for the Captain. Then, besides having to pretend to be ill, and to go to the inquest, and to superintend his

DOUBLOONS

funeral, I had my marine arrangements to perfect and complete. And then, to worry me still further, I began to have my doubts about yourself; I found out the identity of the youth Meredith — the chit resembles her uncle in certain points of character; and, to cap all, I was compelled to waste precious time in dealing with Mr. Varcoe."

Philip gave a start before he could control himself.

"I see I'm beginning to excite you now," Pollexfen observed with an agreeable and ironic smile. "Admit it."

Masters was conscious of a feeling hardly to be differentiated from terror. And yet Pollexfen talked so easily, so naturally, with such an undeniable charm of manner, that his listener could scarcely comprehend his own mental disturbance.

"Where is Varcoe?" he demanded, in a nervous voice.

"Let me see," Pollexfen said reflectively. "To-day is Monday. This makes the third day. Yes. . . . All London will know to-night where Varcoe is. Mr. Varcoe was a very able man — conceited, over-confident, but able. He made all his preparations, and he meant to strike with a single blow, like Kitchener at Omdurman. He was guilty of only one mistake. He thought I didn't suspect him. Whereas the contrary was the case. So that when he entered my room, for the battle of Omdurman, I was waiting for him behind the door, with my little instrument, and the battle occurred differently. You ask me where he is. Well, on the day of my arrival at the Corner House, I was obliged to find a hiding-place for male attire and other details, and I took up the floor, loosening the nails under the bed. Nothing is simpler to a man who has been in all trades,

DOUBLOONS

from navvying to treasure-seeking, including naturally that of a carpenter, than to arrange nail-heads, where nails have been, in a way to escape detection even under a close scrutiny. I could lift and replace the planks of the floor in a moment. I had quite a wardrobe down there. Behold the reason why you and your little friend found nothing when you feloniously searched my chamber last night. Don't deny it, don't attempt to deny it; I saw at once you had been on the prowl." He laughed quietly.

"I am not denying it," Philip put in.

"Good! I should have put the Captain under the floor and left London on the morning after his death; but he was unhappily too fat. And, moreover, his weight might have sent him through the ceiling of the room below, which would have been awkward! These objections did not apply to the rising detective, Mr. Varcoe, who was slight and thin. He lies in repose under the floor of that room, wedged in between two rafters. His rest will be interrupted . . . the laws of the decomposition of animal matter . . . you see?"

"It's astounding!" Philip burst out, utterly revolted by the detailed confession to which he was obliged to listen, and which, indeed, fascinated him, though as a snake is said to fascinate a bird.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Pollexfen with gentle enthusiasm. "It *is* astounding. When I think of the skill, the presence of mind, the sheer nerve, which were required for the whole operation, even I am amazed. I had a certain regret in bringing Mr. Varcoe's career to a close. But it was a purely sentimental regret, caused by his talents, and somewhat unworthy of me. Of course, when a man becomes a detective, to be killed

DOUBLOONS

is part of his trade. The risks, if not as great as the risks run by a miner or a shunter, or a President of the United States, are considerable. Detectives know that quite well. It's fair. In this particular instance Mr. Varcoe wanted to get a person named Billington to put me to a violent death, accompanied by every circumstance of shame. I objected, and the inevitable outcome of my objection was Mr. Varcoe's own decease. I —"

"You may talk till you're black in the face," Philip interrupted the actor. "You know what I think! You've simply got no regard for human life at all."

Pollexfen gazed at him, and there was a just perceptible lowering of the corners of his lips.

"You exaggerate, my young friend," said Pollexfen; "I have some regard for human life, though it is not unlimited. For example, I have much more regard for human life than a cabinet of ministers who meet before lunch and decide on a war. The last cabinet that did so killed probably about ten thousand people per head. But does it interfere with their sleep. Not in the least. What is the matter with you, Mr. Masters, if I may say so, is that you have never thought; you have never honestly tried to look at things as they are. Unfortunately it is now too late."

Philip said nothing.

"In the entire complicated affair, after my original clumsiness in making the Captain unconscious permanently, instead of temporarily, I only made one error. You guess what that was?"

Philip shook his head.

"I bruised my wrist against the window sash in lowering

DOUBLOONS

our poor Captain from the window to the alley. That was an accident that might have happened to anyone. But I ought to have washed and bandaged my wrist at once. And I did not; I merely licked it. Knowing the danger of finger-marks, I merely licked it! I was perhaps somewhat nervous and hurried, and I could not bring myself to stop in order to wash and bandage my hand. I did not observe till my job was almost accomplished that the wound had been bleeding slightly. A pity, a pity! Nevertheless, that was my one error. And instead of being lost in admiration of my courage, my originality, my skill, my inventiveness, my imagination, you can find nothing to say except in dispraise. Why, you cannot examine a single minute detail of my actions since I first determined to have a hand in this business of the late Captain's, without being struck by my genius! Thus I went back to the Obelisk Hotel as Pollexfen *after* I had taken a room at the Corner House as Mrs. Upottery, so that there should be circumstantial evidence that Mrs. Upottery and Mr. Pollexfen existed separately at the same time, and could not, therefore, be the same person. And look how I deceived you! Consider how perfectly, with what admirable sang-froid, I took you in at Castle Street! And in surreptitiously exchanging two of my hundred-pound notes for two of yours, did I not invent an entirely new method of disposing, at their full price, of bank-notes that the police have put on the Index Expurgatorious? Answer me."

"You did," said Philip obediently.

"It is a pity about that finger-mark," Pollexfen mused aloud. "A pity!"

DOUBLOONS

"Why? You have succeeded."

"I say it is a pity, because I like you. I don't know why I like you, but I do. You are the sort of simple, straight Englishman that appeals to a complex person like myself, who own no nationality, and who always see two sides to a question. If I had not marked that bit of stone, if you had not found it, and put it in your bag, if your bag had not been lost, if Varcoe had not by accident rediscovered it at the bottom of the area steps, if he had not left it in your bedroom, if you had not regained it and become infected with a passion for dactylography — why, then, I should not have before me at the present instant a rather unpleasant prospect."

"What prospect?"

"The prospect of — er — sending you to explain to Varcoe."

Philip thought he noticed a tremor in Pollexfen's voice. He sat up straight on the bunk.

"What on earth do you want to kill *me* for?" he inquired with splendid amazement. "You've succeeded! You've got clear off! This is sheer lust for blood!"

"I hate blood," said Pollexfen. "Besides there won't be any. And I don't want to kill you. I should much prefer not to. But where is the alternative? I can't keep you in captivity. And the moment I let you go, I am a lost man — or, if not lost, a man in a highly dangerous predicament. The ports of the world will be closed against this yacht inside half a dozen hours. And such is the respect in England for those two occidental fetishes, the sanctity of property and the sanctity of the higher forms of animal life, that the British Govern-

DOUBLOONS

ment would be even capable of sending out a torpedo boat-destroyer to look for me with a few twelve-pounders. No! It is said that the devil employs the energies of the idle, and he has certainly employed yours. He has ruined your earthly career, and I repeat I regret it."

"You can kill me if you like," said Philip quietly, "but you're a scoundrel. And I give myself the pleasure of telling you so. Yes, sir," he added, moving forward and becoming a little excited, "a scoundrel! Not to say a coward!"

"Your previous position, horizontally on the bunk, will be better, I think," responded Pollexfen. "You are coming too close. Do you hear?" He advanced his revolver an inch or two.

And the muzzle of the revolver, in the confined space of the cabin, was indeed so near to Philip that almost involuntarily Philip slipped back again on to the bunk.

"I did not begin to relate to you my share in the affair," Pollexfen resumed placidly, "until I had definitely resolved what your fate was to be. I thought it would interest you to hear certain details known only to me, and it appears that I was not mistaken. I also, as I told you at the beginning of our interview, felt the need of talking frankly to someone. A man such as I is apt to lead a somewhat solitary life."

"I can believe it," said Philip succinctly.

Pollexfen smiled.

"And mental solitude is apt to get on one's nerves. Our little chat has really done me a great deal of good. To return, however, to yourself. Now, just as I performed a service to Captain Pollexfen, so I shall be performing a service to you. You are alone in the world. You've

DOUBLOONS

nobody depending on you. Your sole fortune consists of two hundred-pound notes, which you can't possibly negotiate. You have no profession. You have no career. You are not the sort of man who succeeds in England. Either you ought to have been born a millionaire and become a M.F.H. in some remote county, or you ought to have emigrated to Canada. Your life would be decidedly a failure. You would gradually lose your illusions and your hair, and grow into a dissatisfied person. In another thirty years you would have developed into one of those tedious, aged fools who frequent clubs, and go about grumbling that things are not what they once were, and that the end of the world is at hand. And your acquaintances would be waiting with suppressed, expectant joy for news of your funeral. A nice prospect, truly! Upon my soul, I was regretting your immediate decease a few moments ago. I regret it no longer. Only your enemies could wish you to live."

"And how do you mean to kill me?" Philip asked.

"I will not tell you," said Pollexfen. "If I told you I should not be 'quite nice' to you, to use your own phrase. But you will suffer the minimum of inconvenience."

"Look here," Philip fronted him, leaning on one elbow, "you've played a goodish few comedies this last week. Are you playing one now?"

"I am not," said Pollexfen simply.

And Philip was convinced that Pollexfen was not playing a comedy. During the previous hour he had gained some insight into the man's personality. He had got accustomed to the seduction of his voice, and to the strangeness of his senti-

DOUBLOONS

ments. He had begun to admire Pollexfen. Singular phenomenon and a remarkable tribute to Philip's impartiality — he admired him even in that moment! He admired him because the fellow had all the courage of his amazing character. He was not ashamed of his instincts. He did not seek to call things by their wrong names. He never for a moment pretended that self-interest was not his sole guide in this sub-lunary existence. . . . Yes, Philip admired him. But at the same time Philip did not precisely see himself dead! The tremendous and passionate instinct of self-preservation gradually assumed dominion of his brain, and he began to assess the situation, to search for ways of escape, to calculate his chances.

The vision of Mary Pollexfen rose before him, and as that image gained clearness in his mind an anger against Walter Pollexfen — an anger which no mere virtuous indignation had been able to excite — seethed and boiled within him. Was he to be cut off from Mary Pollexfen? The mere idea of such a possibility was grotesque. It was ridiculous! It was inconceivable. Why! He and Mary Pollexfen had become intimate! Only a few hours since — and he was dining with him and she had decided to trust him, to rely on him. And after that, was he to disappear off the face of the earth according to the whim of Walter Pollexfen? A woman waited for him, and she would wait in vain? A wave of supreme and ineffable tenderness swept over him as he recalled the tone in which Mary had said, speaking of the false hair: "*I hope you don't mind.*" He could hear her voice as he lay there in the cabin under the implacable watchfulness of Walter

DOUBLOONS

Pollexfen. And that spiritual echo brought the tears up to his eyes. He felt in the profoundest depth of his heart that there was only one thing worth living for . . . And he had found that thing! And Pollexfen meant to kill him!

“Life is strange!” he thought.

In obedience to what secret end of what secret Power had *he*, hitherto a traveler through the absolutely commonplace, been deflected from his course into this bliss of passion and this danger of death? He could not answer. But he could say, with the blind and magnificent enthusiasm of his humanity, that the bliss of passion outweighed the danger of death. And that had he the last week to live again, nothing would induce him to forego those hours with Mary Pollexfen.

His gaze met Pollexfen's. Should he rush at him and take the chance of not being killed or seriously hurt by the revolver? No. That would not be worth while. Pollexfen would not be the kind of man to run the slightest risk in such a situation. And doubtless he could shoot as well as he could use a spade or act the part of a woman, or invent interesting evidence at an inquest. The only thing to do was to wait, with a lynx eye, for any development which he might turn to his own favor. . . . And then the idea of waiting chilled him, chilled his inmost heart, stifled the mad hopes in his throbbing brain. The fact was, he was doomed. He could do nothing. To make a formal protest would be farcical and nothing more. Should he make an appeal to Pollexfen, an appeal *ad misericordiam*? Such was Philip's mental constitution that not even to win Mary could he have persuaded himself

DOUBLOONS

to do that. He was vastly more inclined to spit out at Pollexfen his ferocious disgust.

"I must say you take it very calmly," Pollexfen observed at length.

"Do I?" said Philip scornfully. "If you were an honest man you would at any rate —"

"Stop a minute," Pollexfen interrupted him. "What is an honest man? Do you call yourself an honest man?"

"Certainly," Philip replied. "I have never been a thief, much less a murderer, and I have never cheated and never broken my word."

"Really!" was Pollexfen's comment. "Well, I suppose that's an ideal, like any other ideal. But I would honestly like to know how far your honesty would carry you. I have a good mind to make the experiment."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll give you your life in exchange for your word."

"My word?" Philip questioned. And he had a curious feeling in the small of his back.

"Yes, your word that you won't knowingly do anything that might either directly or indirectly help to bring me into the hands of what England calls Justice."

"That I won't give you away to the police?"

"Precisely. Either now or in the future. Also that you won't leave this yacht without my permission."

Philip pondered, thinking of Mary Pollexfen, and life, and love, and the bright world. He thought a long time — several minutes.

"It's a bargain," he murmured.

DOUBLOONS

"Now, mind," Pollexfen warned him. "Think well over what you are promising. And remember that I'm doing this out of an idle and quixotic desire to know if, after all, there is an honest man on this earth. I expect I'm making a fool of myself. But it's in me to act like that, and it would be useless for me to try to be anybody but Walter Pollexfen. You give me your word to do no hing against me?"

"Haven't I told you it's a bargain?" cried Philip testily. "How many more times do you want to be informed?"

Pollexfen laughed.

"Let me return your revolver," he said, and, stepping forward he laid the revolver on the bunk by Philip's side.

Philip hid his face in his hands.

XXIII

THE LOG

“**W**HAT is the object of all this?” Philip inquired in a new voice, looking up suddenly and wiping his face.

“The object of all what?”

“All this butchery, theft, lying, and general scoundrelism.” Mr. Walter Pollexfen paused.

“Let me read you something, shall I?” he said.

“If it will answer my question.”

Pollexfen, for reply, opened his jacket, and drew from an inner pocket a large leather case, and from the case he extracted a document apparently consisting of several sheets fastened together.

“Listen,” he said.

And he began to read:

“Praise be to God Almighty and to Gabriel — not to the archangel, but that merry fiend, Josephine Gabriel, our captain and commander. To-day being the 4th of March, 1654, did our gallant caravel of the black flag and white skull, once known as the ‘Olive Branch,’ but of late more widely feared under the name of ‘El Legato,’ slip from the lee of Monkey Island, nigh Grenada, and accost a certain Spaniard, who had been blown away from her consort overnight and

DOUBLOONS

here waddled, a lame duck with a broken leg, helpless, while her company struggled to make her shipshape. She was the 'Golconda,' and a golconda she proved. Our little bitch capered about her, like a mouse round a cheese, and she fired a big gun once or twice, but whether to do us hurt or summon rescue I know not. Then Gabriel led us on, and 'twas butchery not battle, for the poor fools called upon heaven; and heaven by good fortune chanced happily to be elsewhere and replied not. Therefore, since Providence could not come to them, they went to Providence, and the Caribee sharks fed full. So also did the sharks of El Legato. At sunset two English privateers hove in sight; but when they reached the 'Golconda' she was a golconda no more. They found a great ship blazing as the nethermost beacon of hell, and a sea red with blood and fire. A thousand coveted things went down in her and 'twas hard on Gabriel that Providence suffered him not to mind his affairs a little matter of one day more. We, however, had by no manner of means wasted the hours allotted to us, and ere the Englishmen could come up we were snug in a favorite hiding-place of Gabriel's — a cover only to be dared in fair weather, and then by none but small ships and brave navigators.

"On the north side of Grenada stand a grinning row of rocks known as the 'Mermaid's Comb,' and behind them is a deep inlet. L'Ollonais showed it to us, and that Prince of Devils hoped by so doing, should we attempt it, to wreck our midget and leave him a rival the less; but Gabriel is as good as L'Ollonais, or Morgan himself, in deep water, though he cannot cut out a live heart and eat it with such appetite as

DOUBLOONS

can they. Through the Mermaid's Comb we crept and, before another day dawned, had carried our immense booty to the sacred, secret, desolate shore of the Grand Etang, that inland lake of Grenada, where dwell all the West Indian devils of Obi, and their Queen, the Mother of the Rain. The place is as safe from assault as Davy Jones's locker, for neither nigger nor Carib would dare to walk beside those silent waters of horror, or to touch a twig or pluck a fruit in the haunted glades of the Grand Etang.

"The 'Golconda' was in verity a treasure ship, and, briefly, we had nigh one hundred thousand pieces of eight by her. We had toiled like demons, and by midnight we had sunk the last box in the Grand Etang.

"This is the guide to the hiding-place of the boxes beside the Grand Etang. Start from the gray stone that thrusts a yard above the water on the west shore. Take paces two hundred to the East. Face the sun at evening as it sets in mid November behind the Hill of Palms. Then take fourteen paces forth right into the lake, which there hath a depth of five feet."

Pollexfen ceased, and looked over the paper at Philip, his eyes glistening.

"You perceive?" he said.

"Then it's sunk treasure after all!" Philip exclaimed.

"It is sunk treasure after all," Pollexfen responded. "You ought not to have been deceived by my ingenious references to Russian Secret Societies at the inquest."

"I was not," Philip returned. "But I find the sunk treasure theme equally surprising."

DOUBLOONS

"Nevertheless," said Pollexfen, and Philip could not but remark the avaricious glitter in his eyes, "the thing is perfectly serious. What I have read to you is a translation from the Spanish of the log of the 'El Legato.' My brother was in possession of the whole history of that log. I need not read the rest to you. It relates how Master Gabriel and his crew were called suddenly away by circumstances over which they had no control, leaving their treasure where they had sunk it. Two days later the 'El Legato' was captured and gutted and then sunk, only the crew being left in her. And there exists a highly curious circumstantial proof that the treasure has never been disturbed to this day and hour."

"In a word," Philip commented, "you are after doubloons."

"Doubloons is precisely the term," said Pollexfen. He then put the papers back in his pocket, and consulted his watch. "Ah!" he ejaculated, as if in relief, "you turn me round your little finger, young man. I give you absolutely all the information you ask for. My trust in you is such as to prove that throughout a career crowded with misfortune I have preserved at any rate some of my illusions."

For the second time the ship trembled to the beat of her engines.

"We are off," Pollexfen stated with a casual air. "I shall have to leave you here for a while, until we get out of the Thames. You might, after all, jump overboard and swim ashore, and so I would just as soon keep you under my own eye. Your incarceration will only be for a few hours. All my excuses!"

DOUBLOONS

He departed, fastening the door on the outside.

"Well," Philip muttered to himself, "I'm in for it." And he began to calculate by what date he might hope to get back to England; and also to consider what explanation of his conduct he should give to Mary Pollexfen. He decided, however, with a remarkable complacency of masculinity, that she would be overjoyed that he had saved his life on no matter what terms.

"To think," he reflected, "that a man so extraordinary as this Pollexfen person should be hoodwinked by a silly yarn about secret treasure. If this precious translated log isn't a fraud I'll eat my hat, but to get it he has not stopped at murder. However, all actors have something bizarre in their composition, and he's no exception."

He could now feel the motion of the yacht. He was hungry.

XXIV

A NEW WORLD

SIR Anthony Diding was looking at a map that billowed over his knees.

"We've only got to turn just a shade to the left, instead of swinging clean round to the right, and we go straight there," he said. "Upon my soul, it's no distance at all."

Mary Pollexfen leaned from her seat, and glancing at the map, gave a polite assent to Tony's statement. Mrs. Appleby, without stirring, remarked that she never could understand maps, but that no doubt Tony was correct.

They were not approaching Piccadilly Circus in a barouche, and the question was not whether they should follow Shaftesbury Avenue or turn down sharp toward Waterloo Place. They were on the promenade deck of the steam-yacht "Wanderer," thirteen days out from London, and the question was whether they should proceed direct to Grenada or call at Bridgetown, Barbadoes, which is about half-a-day's sail nearer Charing Cross than any other island of the West Indies. Sir Anthony's phraseology in discussing the matter might have been held to prove that the maritime instinct is not born in all Englishmen, had it not been for the fact that in every minute detail of his dress Sir Anthony showed sub-

DOUBLOONS

lime evidences of a true and deep feeling for the sea. As an amateur yachtsman he satisfied the eye if not the ear.

The "Wanderer" was doing twelve out of her advertised thirteen knots through an ocean as flat as the Serpentine. Dusk drew on, and the water had already lost some of its glittering blue. The hush and melancholy of evening invaded gently the white vessel as she drove her funnel and her two masts across that immense, mysterious floor, dragging after her the somber scarf of her smoke. She seemed to be alone in the endless universe. To Mary Pollexfen it was as if the voyage had begun far back in the mists of time, and as if the unceasing beat of those engines would continue forever into eternity.

"Sir Anthony," came a cold, polite voice from the bridge above.

"Well, Captain?"

"We shall make Bridgetown about six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"It appears to me such a waste of time to call there," said Tony.

"Indeed!" answered the Captain. "And supposing, Sir Anthony, there's no coal to be got at St. George's? Where are we then?"

The tone was merciless, and yet irreproachably courteous. Sir Anthony had in truth made a surprising discovery in regard to ocean travel. He had found that nothing is easier than to hire a yacht. You go into an office, sign some papers, write out a check, and the yacht is yours for three months. But the surprising discovery was that a yacht can be yours

DOUBLOONS

and not yours at the same moment. Now at the commencement of the voyage Sir Anthony had committed the indiscretion of mistaking the captain for a chauffeur. Even Auchengray, the chief engineer, was much more than a chauffeur, and Captain Chetwode was much more than Auchengray. Captain Chetwode's history was simple and tragic. The "Wanderer," under another name (which we do not care to divulge), had once been the private yacht of a famous Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who happened to be an Earl; and in those days Captain Chetwode (who reckoned to have some good blood in his own body) was a personage at Cowes and Oban. Then the Earl had sold the yacht in order to devote himself exclusively to motor-cars and motor-boats. Worse, he had sold her to a firm of brokers who fell into the habit of hiring her out at fancy prices to rich fools ignorant of the sea. Captain Chetwode, not obtaining instantly another employer equally distinguished with the Earl, had accepted, *pro tempore*, an offer from the brokers, and to his own terrible disgust he had remained in command of the "Wanderer" ever since. He had slipped into a rut, and he felt that he could never get out of it. He who once had the right to condescend to any owner who was not a member of the R.Y.S., he who once had guided Emperors and princes through the difficult tides of the Solent, he who once had been round the world with an earl, a grand-duke, and a grand-duchess on board, was now in command of a floating thing that he regarded as a mere excursion steamer. "Auchengray," he had said one night after five whiskies, "it's no better than the blooming Midnight Sun."

DOUBLOONS

That he now had charge of a leading London dandy with an historic title, and of one of the most celebrated and beautiful women in England, was apparently nothing to Captain Chetwode. They were not real yachting people. They were not of the elect. They had not moved in yachting circles. Yachts were not their sole passion. They were trippers for Captain Chetwode, though the "Wanderer" was costing Tony over fifteen hundred a month. Consequently, Captain Chetwode treated them with the politest disdain. He would not be wooed, and he would not suffer his crew to be wooed. He messed alone, and his principal instrument of small talk was the word "Indeed!" It is conceivable that Mary Pollexfen might have done something with him, had not Sir Anthony been indiscreet on the first day. Chetwode, however, was scarcely the man to recover from even an unintentional slight in less than about ten years. He was Captain of the "Wanderer," and long before the thirteenth day Tony had learnt that a captain is always a captain, and not less so because you are paying his wages. He had also learnt that a ship is its captain's.

Hence was it that Tony was being compelled to take his passengers to Barbadoes instead of going direct to Grenada, and that during the night the yacht did not "turn just a shade to the left." The coal argument was, of course, unanswerable. Tony did not attempt to answer it, but he strongly objected to it. He wanted to get to Grenada and the Grand Etang. He experienced the sensation of a person who is driving in a cab to an appointment for which he fears to be late — he had an absurd desire to push with his arms. The

DOUBLOONS

near approach of the adventure was affecting his nerves, as it was affecting the nerves of Mary Pollexfen. Mrs. Appleby happily had no nerves, though she believed herself rich in them. Her son, while expecting fun in Grenada of the highest possible quality, had created such multifarious interests in the engine-room and the second officer's cabin that he could afford to wait for the island of the Grand Etang. The master-brain, the brain of Oxwich, had gradually been simplified into one overmastering instinct — the instinct to disembark, whose force is well known to most travelers who have spent more than ten consecutive days on the main. The voyage had been an exceptionally calm one, but not exceptionally calm enough for Oxwich.

After dinner, rain having come on, Tony and Mary were sitting together in the drawing-room, silent and self-conscious. Mrs. Appleby had gone off to superintend the disposal of her darling in his bunk. Neither the baronet nor the *diva* could have explained why they were self-conscious. The explanation was too subtle for words. But it centered in the image of Philip Masters that both had in their hearts. As for Tony, he had meant to make love to Mary Pollexfen, but her attitude had forced him to give up that enterprise in despair. Moreover, Josephine Fire remained obstinately in his mind.

"I wonder if it's still raining?" he said

"I wonder!" answered Mary.

With a simultaneous movement they rose, Mary throwing a white shawl over her white dress, and went to the star-board door of the saloon. It rained no longer. The sky had

DOUBLOONS

cleared, though the promenade deck was wet. Near the door stood the tall, angular, bearded figure of Captain Chetwode, leaning over the rail and gazing in the dark water at his spoiled career. He turned and raised his hat.

"Further," he remarked, resuming abruptly the conversation of three hours' earlier, "your friend's yacht — the 'White Rose,' I fancy you said her name was — is pretty sure to have called at Barbadoes to coal. She may even be there."

And he walked away into the darkness, saluting again.

He had throughout steadily pretended to have no curiosity as to the object of the voyage. According to him the voyage, and not the object of the voyage, was his affair. He kept his place, and he managed to convey his resolution that baronets should be forced to keep theirs. His present gratuitous remark was therefore rather astonishing. The sudden thought that Philip might be close to them that night, perhaps in some strange and dangerous captivity, thrilled them both.

"Good-night," said Mary, after a curious pause.

"Going to bed?" Tony questioned. "I am, too. Good-night. To-morrow —"

She shook hands limply and left him. He whistled and lit a cigarette.

An hour later Mary, enveloped in an ulster, returned cautiously to the upper deck. There was no sign of Tony, who had retired to the dreamless slumber which he always enjoyed. She could not sleep. She could not think of sleep. She found a chair abaft the chart-room and gave herself up to contemplation.

What did the future hold? What could they expect to accomplish by this rush across nearly four thousand miles of

DOUBLOONS

ocean? The journey seemed to her now more than ever like a fantastic escapade. Assuming that they encountered the "White Rose" — what then? The undertaking was wild, considered calmly thus under the majestic equatorial heaven. And yet she would not wish it uncommenced. She had hopes — hopes that refused to be analyzed. The imminence of great events hung over her brooding spirit, a tantalizing curtain which she could not rend.

Then, after a long while, a bell softly broke the silence of the throbbing yacht, and she became aware of a form at her elbow. It was the Captain once more.

"You should come on to the bridge," said he. "You can see the Southern Cross."

She discerned sympathy in his tone, and it startled her. In a sort of dream she obeyed the suggestion and followed him. He took the wheel silently from the officer of the watch, and in another instant Mary and the Captain were alone together.

A glorious tropic moonlight robed the water in silver gray. A wide pathway of rippling sheen was flowing from west to east, and the horizon of the south was dark. There, sparkling low on the verge, Mary saw the legendary constellation. The false Southern Cross shone brave and undimmed; the true, rose but little above the sea, a modest pyrotechny. She confessed her feminine disappointment.

"Yes," the skipper agreed. "Not much to sit up all night for, is it? You need to go further south to see it at its best. But it's overrated all the time. We've got the best stars in the northern hemisphere, just the same as we've got the best of everything else."

DOUBLOONS

She liked his English bigotry. His hands fingered the wheel as they might have fingered a woman's hair, and the electric lamp cast queer shadows of them across his figure.

Ahead, under the setting moon, lay a long, low, black object stretched between two great lights, one red, one white.

"What is that?" she asked.

"That's Barbadoes," said the skipper briefly. "That's the West Indies, that is!"

A strange emotion possessed her as her imagination dwelt on the flying yacht, with its unconscious souls, speeding relentlessly toward the ancient island and toward fate. This was a different world into which they were slipping. She perceived in the Captain for the first time a fellow creature. So they stood.

Then, with amazing swiftness, the solemn but eager majesty of the dawn swallowed the stars like morsels and irradiated the world with a flood of harmonious splendor. Moonlight and morning first wove the birth-robe, and out of their rose and silver came the flushed, radiant face of the young day. The moon withered to a dead aspen leaf in the firmament and vanished; from pure white the dawn mellowed to tender saffron; then a sudden change marked the approach of the sun. Great streaks and splashes of dazzling orange broke up the east, and, quickly as one might tell it, the sun was above the sea and rolling his rapid fire up the flaming stairs of the sky. The bewildering transition from darkness to light had taken place with equatorial abruptness.

At the same moment, as though the risen sun was the signal, the deck became alive. The holy stones began their

DOUBLOONS

harsh music and the hoses sent glittering streams along the bright planks. It was the hour of the yacht's toilet.

Presently appeared among the barefooted sailors a swarthier figure delicately balancing a bowl. He ascended to the bridge.

"Dar, miss!" he said. "Coffee."

It was Coco. Coco, after having been interviewed and cross-examined by Sir Anthony and Oxwich, had entreated leave to accompany the expedition, and as it seemed more than probable that he might be useful, his request had been granted. Nominally he was attached to the important culinary department of the "Wanderer." Really, he had become Mary's faithful and indefatigable servant. They often talked together of his dead master, and Coco had crucified his opinion that Giralda was a hussy.

He wept as he served the coffee — wept freely. The sight of his native land overpowered him.

"Me Gard, missie!" he whined, "dar's my ole Bim! Ebberyting jus' de same! — jus' de same! I specs dar'll be some fun ashore when my frens see me in my best rig out. Dar Bridgetown — dar dat dam old Pelican Island — dar de cane-fields and de wind-mills, an' —"

"Leave the bridge," ejaculated the Captain, who had evidently put on his normal self after the emotional abandonment of the night.

"When shall we be in?" Mary inquired, later.

"In an hour or so," the Captain replied.

"Thank you for inviting me up here," she said, and then descended.

XXV

APPROACH OF THE ADVENTURE

THE "Wanderer," drenched in sunshine, had dropped the anchor, half a mile from shore, amid the multicolored craft of Carlisle Bay. She was surrounded, at a respectful distance, by a ring of small boats. One boat alone had approached her, and from this boat a man in white, with "functionary" written over all his body, climbed in due solemnity her towering side. The Captain and the first officer received him in state. He shook hands with Tony, and bowed low to the ladies. Master Horace Appleby mistook him for some local Sultan. But he was merely the Medical Officer of Bridgetown, come to give *pratique*. Several vessels in the harbor were flying the yellow flag, a fact which impressed Horace enormously.

"All well here?" asked the Captain.

"All well," said the Medical Officer; "and you?"

"All well."

This assurance, however, did not prevent him from looking at Horace's tongue, nor from taking the temperature of Oxwich. He was new to his post, and had not yet outgrown the aptitude to be over-conscientious.

Mary Pollexfen whispered to Sir Anthony, and the baronet stepped forward.

DOUBLOONS

"Pardon me," he said, "has the yacht 'White Rose' arrived?"

"I have seen no such yacht," answered the official.

"And she could not have put in without your knowledge?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the officer, shocked at such an idea.

After having devised a new cocktail for the Captain, he departed with the ceremonies that had accompanied his arrival. Then the ring of boats closed in on the "Wanderer" from every side. It was useless for Coco, in magnificent array, to protest to these Barbadian watermen that they were not wanted, and that the "Wanderer's" launch was being got ready. They screamed and fought with one another in their red-cushioned craft, determined to obtain fares or perish in the attempt. Horace could have wished them pirates. When the launch puffed away shorewards, with the Captain and Tony's entire party on board, they followed it like the variegated tail of a comet, still stridently answering the insults which Coco poured out upon them.

"I suppose you've got your revolver, uncle?" Horace demanded as they stepped ashore.

"No," said Tony. "I'm relying on you to defend us all."

"Well, then, I shall buy a revolver," said Horace stoutly, "and a belt, and I shall put the revolver in the belt. I can, can't I, Mother?"

"If your uncle wishes," said the matron; "but it mustn't be loaded."

"Now, just listen to that, uncle!" Horace protested.

DOUBLOONS

"What's the good of a revolver if it isn't loaded? Isn't that exactly like a woman?"

"At what hour do you wish to return to the yacht, Sir Anthony?" the Captain formally inquired.

"As soon as you've coaled her, Captain," was Tony's reply, given with a terrific air of determination.

"That may be to-day, or it may be to-morrow," the Captain said.

"But can't you make it to-day?" Mary asked.

The Captain looked at her.

"I can try," he said, and disappeared.

Oxwich also had vanished. But Coco remained, a glorious and excessively important! Coco, resolved to do the honors of the capital.

"You come dis way. You all come dis way!" He flourished an arm. "You come wid me to the Ice-House, and I gib you flying fish for breakfast. Dey know me at de Ice-House. Dey know Marse Coco. I speak to dem for you."

And they meekly followed the negro into that uproar and movement and flame of splashed color which calls itself Bridgetown.

A street of white houses, under wooden tiles, silver-gray in the tremendous sunshine with open shop fronts and bright green jalousies to the windows, shone under a canopy of deep blue sky; while the glaring road cast up a shimmer of hot air, with puffs of dust at every stray breath of wind or passage of hoof or wheel. Noisy crowds traveled up and down. Little trams, with tinkling bells, passed incessantly to Bell-field, Fontabelle, and other places without the metropolis; teams

DOUBLOONS

of squealing mules brought down barrels of sugar and molasses from the Estates; donkeys bore bright bundles of green cane tops; public conveyances crawled by the sidewalks and private buggies hurried about, their feminine occupants generally wearing black veils to shield their eyes from the dazzle of the white coral streets. Women filled the footways. With naked feet, white dresses, and gay turbans, they wandered chattering along, each with a basket on her head. They sold cocoanuts, sugar-cane, oranges, limes, mangoes, yams, fish, cakes, sweetmeats, nuts, pineapples, bananas, pickles, and a hundred other commodities. Mrs. Appleby vastly admired these women, upright as darts from the custom of carrying their wares upon their heads, with their ceaseless movement, their quaint whining cachinnation, and their brilliant glitter of black eyes and white teeth. She also probably envied them their scanty toilets as the sun smote pitilessly down. The men toiled, urged on their cattle, jabbered incessantly, ordered each other about, and shone like metal statues where their hot chocolate skins burst out of their rags. At shady corners, or where balconies threw a shadow, sat the loafers — a very numerous throng. They munched cane and fruit, bargained with the women who sold drink, sucked lumps of ice when they could steal them, smoked pipes and their long cigars, laughed, chaffed, told stories, gesticulated, and played the fool. Ancient and tattered human ruins wandered about begging; a dozen boys rushed yelling past, baiting an old insane negro; a gray, bent, blind man loudly demanded alms; children swarmed like flies; little mites with black woolly heads and naked limbs — all colors from

DOUBLOONS

Indian ink to putty — sat in the sun and rolled in the gutters and played with their toes and crowed and howled according to good or evil fortune, and got kicked about among the dogs.

At intervals the burning glare of the street was slaked by an official with a water-hose. Policemen, dressed in white, occasionally appeared; and now and then a ragged, expostulating scamp, was led away to justice by two or three of them. Lean, wiry beasts, that looked like greyhounds, but were really West Indian pigs, passed in a drove; cackling Muscovy ducks and cocks and hens were carried by in baskets. A black clergyman went along with his head in the air and a fat smile on his contented countenance; magnificent and prosperous negroes, negresses, mulatresses and quadroons with gaudy hats and parasols, elastic-sided boots, and showy trinkets, sauntered up and down to impress the humbler folk; the Barbadian merchant in white ducks and a chimney-pot hat was also prominent. Great dragon-flies flashed hither and thither; and the air itself, dancing hotly upon Mary's cheek, was not only full of turmoil but thick and heavy with warm, soft, crawling odors of dust, fruit, cane, and offal.

It was a faint and dazed party that ultimately arrived at the celebrated Ice-House, the *avant guard* of all West Indian restaurants. There, in the cool and shaded seclusion of the first floor, in a room surrounded by broad balconies, they were soon eating the repast of flying fish and sweet potatoes which Coco, with an enormous expenditure of authority, gesticulation, and noise, had ordered for them.

A singular phenomenon occurred after the breakfast.

DOUBLOONS

"Mother's gone to sleep," Horace phrased it, and went on eating, steadily eating.

The charmingly-dressed woman, with her agreeable inclination to *embonpoint*, had indeed yielded to the effects of an unusual matutinal exertion. She dozed tranquilly in her cane chair before an empty plate.

Mary went out on to the balcony overlooking the street, and Tony followed her, opening his cigarette-case.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" said Tony, leaning on the hot wooden balustrade, as they gazed at the riotous scene in the square below them. Mary nodded.

"You don't seem quite happy," Tony blunderingly began, after a pause, as he aimed a spent match at the head of a stout negress who was carrying a basket of linen. Mary met his eyes, and then her glance wandered over his faultlessly-arrayed figure, impeccable from the solar topee to the tan shoes.

"My friend," she answered, "it overpowers me. All these crowds of different sorts of people, all this confusion and bustle and heat! I ask myself what we are going to do here. I ask myself if Grenada, too, will be like this. Do you really expect to find the 'White Rose' and Mr. Masters? They have not been here. They may or may not be at Grenada. They may have been there and left again. Has it struck you that we haven't the least idea what has happened?"

"You're sorry you came?" he questioned rather out of countenance.

"No, no," she said with energy. "I am very, very grateful to you for having come and for having brought me. I would not

DOUBLOONS

have liked to leave anything undone that could be done. But it *is* rather a wild-goose chase, isn't it? I suppose there is only one thing to do — go on to Grenada?"

"Why, of course," he smiled. "Something's bound to turn up."

"And if something does turn up — what then?"

"We shall find Phil."

She sighed.

"I'm afraid," she murmured.

"What of?"

"I don't know what I'm afraid of. It is scarcely a month yet since my dear father — died. And I feel his death more now than at the beginning. He used to come here, you know. He must have been well known here. I daresay he was acquainted with half the people in the place. That makes me feel sad. And when I think of Varcoe's body hidden under the floor of that awful person's bedroom, I —"

A man, preceded by a negro waiter bearing liquids, came out on to the balcony and sat down to a small table. Tony could see him, but Mary's back was toward him. He gazed casually at Tony, and the next moment rose abruptly and left the balcony. A minute afterwards Coco, defying the etiquette of the restaurant, which forbade absolutely the presence of negroes other than servants in the places reserved for white customers, burst in upon them in a frenzy of excitement.

"Did you see him? You see him?" he shouted, beside himself.

"Who? What's the matter, my boy?" said Tony.

"Dat man wid de cocktail. He just gone. Dat de Captain's

DOUBLOONS

brother, missa! De Captain and me, we went to see him at de Obelisk Hotel, and he here now! Same man! Same man!"

He leaned over the balcony, and peered down the thronged street.

"Not Uncle Walter?" Mary breathed.

"Yes! yes! De Captain's brudder. Dar! You look see. Dar! Down dar passing dem pigs. He in a big hurry. You see him? Dar!" He pointed urgently with a fat dark finger.

Mary's eye followed the indication. She singled out a medium-sized, thickset man, hastening along with a peculiar gait toward the port. The untasted cocktail was close to her side.

"It is he!" she pronounced in a strange and thrilled voice. He evidently didn't expect to meet *us* here, and he's running off!" She stood up, her nostrils quivering. "We are on the scent after all. There isn't a second to be lost. Now, Sir Anthony!"

XXVI

THE PREY

THERE was in Mary Pollexfen's tone a challenge which Sir Anthony could not but accept, an entreaty to which only one answer could be given — and that not a spoken one. His reply was such as to startle even Mary by its suddenness. The splendid gesture of the girl, reminding him of her finest attitudes on the stage, inspired him to throw first one and then the other superbly-clad leg over the balustrade of the balcony and slide dangerously down a wooden pillar to the dusty level of Broad Street.

He was gone with a celerity that gave his disappearance the air of a conjuring trick. By a miracle he received no hurt, and, waving the hand of triumph to Mary, he fled down the thoroughfare in the wake of the man whom Coco had designated as Walter Pollexfen.

Coco also put a leg over the balustrade, shouting and gesticulating, but on reconsideration of the enterprise he drew the limb back again and decided to gain the street through the restaurant by the staircase.

"I catch him. I catch him, missy! I run like de debbil!" he cried as he went.

The episode attracted attention in Broad Street, but the

DOUBLOONS

Ethiopian population of Barbadoes having long since ceased to be capable of surprise at the antics of the touring English, and being, moreover, very noisily engaged in its own tremendously important affairs, the interest aroused was as brief as it was violent; and it ended entirely in laughter when Coco, in the roadway, had fallen amid a drove of pigs, and picked himself up, his broadcloth dusty and his temper twisted.

Mary also went out into the street. Mrs. Appleby was still peacefully dozing; but there was not a sign of young Horace.

Sir Anthony had marked his prey, who turned into the Square, was hidden for a moment behind a mass of flaming red and yellow crotons, dodged round some magnificent palms, and came to a momentary pause in the shadow of Nelson's green statue. The prey, while moving both very quickly and very mysteriously, did not openly behave as if he were being pursued. He only looked behind once. He seemed to possess a singular cleverness in avoiding contact with the shrill crowds that inhabited Broad Street and the Square, and he seemed also to be perfectly familiar with the complex geography of the island metropolis. At the statue it was that Tony nearly came up with him — nearly, but not quite. An orange-colored tram labeled in large letters "Fontabelle," and tinkling with a hundred metallic tongues like a Russian sleigh, was just resuming its journey after a pause in the Square, and he calmly stepped on to it, and was borne off, presumably to Fontabelle. Tony did not hesitate; he could not hesitate; there was one thing to do, and he did it. He ran after the tram and boarded it, full of an intention to drag the prey forcibly out of the vehicle, and submit him to

DOUBLOONS

the rigors of West Indian law. But events occurred differently; indeed, they bore no resemblance whatever to the mental picture of the immediate future formed by Tony as he hastened along Broad Street. Owing to nervous excitement he did not get on to the jolting tram with remarkable neatness. In his hurried spring he crushed the conductor's toe, and the conductor, righteously angry, drew his attention to the fact that he had transgressed a by-law. The white ferocity of the conductor's teeth and the blackness of his grin each helped to induce in Tony a more thoughtful mood, a saner view of strategy and tactics. Having no adequate reply to the the conductor, he sought the grateful shade of the interior of the tram. The prey had taken a seat in the left-hand corner near the door, and was rolling a cigarette. At the further end of the car was a full-blooded negro boy sucking a sugar-cane, and midway were two sumptuously-dressed quadroon girls, apparently sisters moving in the most refined aristocratic circles, whose high-pitched chatter, whose colors, and whose musk engaged the senses.

Tony sat down.

He suddenly perceived that he could not attack his prey in this public vehicle. Nor could he put him through a cross-examination. To address him thus: "You are Walter Pollexfen, a scoundrel and a murderer, and I have crossed the world to catch you. Tell me where Philip Masters is, and then come with me to the police station, or I'll break every bone in your body"—such an oration, though justice demanded it, was obviously impossible in the circumstances. The idea of addressing, in a tram-car, a murderer to whom he had not

DOUBLOONS

been introduced was repugnant to Tony's instincts. He wanted to speak, but his tongue refused its office. He was, in a word, not equal to the situation. The languishing black eyes of the quadroons were upon him; the ophthalmic eyes of the cane-sucking boy were also upon him; and he feared lest a scene might end in ridicule for himself. After all, he had not in his pocket a warrant for the arrest of Walter Pollexfen. And the prey had merely to suggest to the public that he, Tony, was a lunatic, in order to score at any rate a serious temporary advantage. Therefore Tony decided to wait until his prey should descend from the tram. And in the meanwhile he pulled his mustache nervously, and discovered that he was hotter than he had ever been in his life before, and that his breakfast was not digesting.

The prey, having rolled one cigarette, rolled another one, and smiled gravely at the floor.

Presently the tram was out of the town and running along a road fringed by great jungles of cane whose drooping polished stems reflected the light like metal. Clumps of bananas, with massive heads of fruit in all stages of perfection, diversified the undulating acres of cane, and here and there a handsome bread-fruit rose into the sky. Wind-mills abounded, and sometimes the thud-thud of an agricultural steam-engine was heard. A hillock of ground now hid the capital and Tony began to wonder whither he was bound and what would be the end of the story. He had a notion that he was leaving civilization behind. He had read in a guide-book that murderers in Barbadoes hide their victims in the tall cane, and that the first symptom of the crime is the gathering

DOUBLOONS

of vultures at a particular spot in the endless and pathless fields. The picture had no charm for him.

The boy, still meditatively sucking, got out; and then, opposite a gay little house bowered in brilliant flowers and foliage, the two quadroons also alighted, laughing and preening, and withdrew slowly and with backward glances into the domain. The prey descended instantly after them; and Tony followed the prey. The tram resumed its journey, and was soon out of sight round a curve.

Tony hesitated. The prey, gazing hard at the house into which the quadroons had retreated, drew forth a pocket-book and made notes. He then turned abruptly to Tony. They were alone on the hot, dazzling road.

"I beg you pardon, sir," said the prey, with a slow American accent, "can you oblige me with a match?" His tone was very persuasive, the quality of his voice beautiful, and his smile pleasant.

And as Tony gazed at the firm, keen, clean-shaven, middle-aged face, and at the strong limbs encased in modest, well-cut blue, he decided that he might as well oblige with a match; and he did so. He thought he could see a resemblance to Mrs. Upottery in those features, and then he thought he couldn't.

"Sultry, isn't it?" said the prey genially.

"Ye-es," Tony agreed, determined to commit himself as little as possible, and he added, suddenly resolved to make the leap: "I want to speak to you. I've come here to speak to you."

"What!" cried the prey. "Are you mixed up in the affair, too?"

DOUBLOONS

"Mixed up in what affair?"

"I see you are," said the stranger. "I was told when I left headquarters at Kingston that I might meet a colleague from Scotland Yard. But I didn't know the "Tiber" was in yet."

Tony stared.

"What affair?" he repeated, astounded.

"Why! I guess there's only one. The Pollexfen affair, isn't it?"

"What do you know about the Pollexfen affair?" Tony stammered.

"Not as much as I want to," the other replied. "Come into the shade of these mahogany trees, will you? But I'm learning all the time, just all the time. You see they cabled us from London to headquarters in Jamaica that the alleged murderer had left London in a private yacht with a couple of thousand pounds and some papers, and as I'd had a pretty considerable experience in Denver and Chicago before I joined the Jamaica force, Trollope told me off to come here and meet the yacht."

"Indeed!" gasped Tony.

"Yes. That's the way of it."

"And has the yacht come?"

"I guess she's come. And *he's* somewhere on this blessed island. He may be over on the other side at the Crane Hotel, for anything I know, but he's on the island. I'm not ready yet to make an arrest. Those two creatures that got out of the car a minute ago — they're in the game. Wouldn't think it, would you? But they are. I've had my eye on 'em for twenty-

DOUBLOONS

four hours. [I saw 'em from the Ice-House coming down Bridge Street. That's why I left my cocktail in such a hurry. One has to hustle, eh? I guess you're the celebrated Varcoe.]

Tony did not know what to say; but he shook his head.

"Come now," the other expostulated. "No need to treat me as if I was the elevator-boy! I saw at once you'd got the Scotland Yard stamp on you."

"I — I took you for Walter Pollexfen," said Tony, trying to be severe.

"You — !"

The prey gave himself up to laughter, gradually but completely. He began with scarcely a sound, shutting his eyes and bending forward; then his mouth opened to a glorious and profound cachinnation.

"Well!" he managed to remark, later, "I award you the medal. Now come along with me, comrade" — he put his arm in Tony's arm. "Come along with me down to the police office — It isn't a mile — And I'll show you off to the boys. No escape. This will cost you cocktails round."

Reassured by the mention of the police office, Tony was inclined to think that either Coco had been entirely mistaken, or he had misunderstood Coco's indication of the man. In any case, he had no alternative but to return to the town. He found the prey an agreeable and intelligent companion. He accepted a cigarette from him, having left his cigarette-case on the balcony of the Ice-House. He hinted to the prey a little about the "Wanderer" and her voyage, and the finding of Varcoe, and other interesting things. But the prey, curbing his curiosity, intimated that he would prefer to postpone the

DOUBLOONS

full discussion of the Pollexfen affair until they were safe in the privacy of the Barbadoes detective department.

After five minutes they halted before a negro's mean dwelling, and the stranger bought a green cocoanut from the negro's wife, who with her two children and a lean cat, blinked and basked in the purple shadow of her doorway. A great, winged grasshopper leaped and flew a few paces ahead.

"As liquid refreshment," said the prey, paring away the top of the nut with his knife exactly as though he were sharpening a huge lead-pencil, "there's nothing so suited to this hades of a climate as green cocoanut. See the pure milk there! Some people put ice in, but whisky is better."

He drew a flask from his pocket, and adulterated the milk's purity. When Tony had shared the drink, Tony's opinion of the stranger rose appreciably.

Further on, a livelier incident happened. At the corner of a sugar-cane field, where the great ragged canes bent over in a wild green and brown and yellow tangle, there stood a mango tree. The time for mangoes was not yet come, but a few, plump and nearly ripe, adorned the topmost branches of the tree, and some sentient being seemed to be up in the summit among them. Beneath the tree stood a big negro in a rage. A crowd of eight or nine other negroes were whispering and posturing at a safe distance of a hundred yards.

"Hi! Uncle Tony!" came a voice from the tree-top.

It was Horace's voice, and it signaled distress.

"Come down, you tief!" the big negro bawled; "no good stopping dar. Come down out ob dat. I hab catched you at last. Come down, I say!"

DOUBLOONS

"Uncle Tony!"

"Friend of yours?" the prey questioned, and the two men hurried to the tree.

"Uncle Tony," sang the shrill voice of the boy, "I thought this was a wild tree, and I climbed up here, and — and —"

"My tree, and de young gem'man know he tief dem mangoes, and he lodge in gaol for it! Colored person somebody in 'Badoes."

"Shut your great mouth, you confounded *che-che!*" commanded the prey.

"No, sar."

The prey produced a revolver, and pointed it at the owner of the mango tree. There was a terrific sensation among the watching group of negroes.

"And now follow me to the police office," the prey ordered the big negro. "You can come down, my little man," he called up the tree. "And bring a mango or two, if you like."

The outraged negro fell in with the suggestion of Bridgetown police office; but, strange to say, he showed no further anger, and followed the little procession which was soon formed.

"Mother's just in front," said Horace, eating his way bravely into a mango. He had consumed that morning nothing but flying fish, sweet potatoes, lamb, peas, oranges in their thin green skins, figs, bananas, plantains, and sapodillas. His appetite was therefore excusable. He at once classed the stranger as a hero of really first-class quality. He gamboled round the stranger; he almost caressed the stranger; and

DOUBLOONS

ultimately he shyly asked permission to inspect the weapon that had so swiftly calmed his enemy.

They met Mrs. Appleby, who was becoming alarmed for her son. She had awakened from her nap, found to her surprise the restaurant empty, and had been compelled to discharge the bill. Her son she happily discovered playing in the Square. He had soothed her and inveigled her into a stroll, and had exercised her till, refusing to be exercised further, she had left him in order to return to the town. She had almost no control over him. When he had recited to her the brilliant episode of the tree and the prey's share in it, the social success of the prey, although no formal introductions were made, was rounded off and perfected. Sir Anthony, his mind an arena of mutually-destructive theories, talked to his sister vaguely and even incoherently.

"I must just go down to the quay first," said the stranger when they arrived at the Square again. "The 'Rhine' sails at one o'clock, and I have to arrange some things. Come with me, will you? Suppose we all drive down together."

"That will be delightful," twittered Mrs. Appleby.

He hailed a rusty vehicle that was crawling by the sidewalk in precisely the Piccadilly manner.

The big negro, who had received a sovereign in secret from Mrs. Appleby, sagaciously sidled off with that noble coin.

XXVII

THE SILENT VESSEL

MARY, having lost sight of both Sir Anthony and Coco, had followed the road down to the harbor. There, under the blazing sky, with the populous blue water at her feet, and the gleaming masses of white buildings around her, and in the distance sun-blached beaches and the palms clustering on Pelican Island, she walked anxiously to and fro amid the yelling bustle of the thousand activities of the quay. What could she do but wait? She regretted that she had no longer her masculine disguise. So concealed, would she not have followed and outdistanced Sir Anthony — yes, and perhaps done more than he? She lacked confidence in Tony. He was a dear, good, vain fellow, but he inspired everything except trust in his ability to meet a crisis successfully. She could not conceive him as a match for Walter Pollexfen, and she was even troubled by vague fears for his personal safety. If only Oxwich had been at hand! At that very moment she caught sight of Oxwich, who, like herself, was perambulating uneasily to and fro near the Careenage. He saw her, too, and came hastening toward her. He was clearly perturbed.

“Excuse me, Miss Pollexfen,” he said, raising his hat and

DOUBLOONS

stopping directly in front of her. "Do you know where Sir Anthony is?"

"I don't," she replied. She felt unable to explain to Oxwich that Tony was pursuing Walter Pollexfen through the mazes of the town. The idea seemed somehow ridiculous. "Do you want him particularly, Oxwich?"

"Well, miss," he said gravely, "the 'White Rose' has come in. That's all."

"The 'White Rose'?" she breathed.

He nodded.

"Came in an hour ago or more, miss. We must have passed her during the night."

"Where is she?"

He pointed northwards into the distance of the bay.

"That gray thing," he said, "with one funnel and no masts. I just met that Medical Officer person, and he told me. Where shall I find Sir Anthony, miss?"

"Oxwich," she almost wept, "I don't know; but he can't be very far off." And she ended by relating to him what had happened at the Ice-House.

Oxwich paused, reflectively.

"There's one thing to be said, miss," he observed at length. "If Mr. Walter Pollexfen is ashore, the 'White Rose' can't be very dangerous, can she? How would you like me to go and have a look at her?"

"You mean at once?"

"I mean at once, miss. Supposing Mr. Masters to be aboard, miss, and Mr. Walter Pollexfen out of the way — you see, miss —"

DOUBLOONS

"I must go with you, Oxwich."

"Certainly, miss."

Most men, she thought, would have tried to dissuade her from the enterprise, but Oxwich was not as other men. On the whole, she decided that she had not often met an individual so solidly based in human common-sense as Oxwich. And here, on the quay, he was less the valet than usual. Indeed, her heart counted him a fellow creature.

"The launch?"

"Yes, miss. It's down behind here." And he led the way.

The launch lay safe and secure where they had quitted it earlier in the morning. But it was deserted. A faint vapor rose from its narrow brass funnel, and a slight heat quivered over the machinery, but otherwise it was lifeless. In vain they gazed along the quay in search of one of the members of the "Wanderer's" crew, and then down into the interior of the launch as if by mere force of desire they could make it active and subservient to their needs. The launch without someone who understood its magic was futile, and though its entire desertion was doubtless contrary to Captain Chetwode's orders, that desertion was none the less a fact. Oxwich accepted the situation at once.

"We must hire a boat, miss," he decided.

And he led the way to where a group of red-cushioned white boats, each presided over by a darkey sucking sugar-cane, swayed gently, bumping in the shallow, diamond-pointed water.

A scarcely perceptible motion of Oxwich's fingers set the fleet in a roar.

DOUBLOONS

“‘Star of Barbadoes’ you want, ar!”

“No, no. Massa want de ‘Pearl’.”

“Go along wid de ‘Pearl’; gen’man calls for de ‘Water Lily’.”

“You man dar, go ’way, go ’way. I say, massa signal me. Yes, sar; coming, sar; de ‘Ocean Spray’ sar.”

“Call me, massa. I know you, massa. You often been in ‘Flying Fish’ to-day. Quite a lady’s boat, sar.”

So the verbal strife continued, until Oxwich had actually set foot in the ‘Flying Fish’, and was giving a respectful hand to Mary to help her to embark. Then the turmoil expired as abruptly as it had arisen, and the ‘Flying Fish’ sped away under Oxwich’s guidance

Such was the burning glare that it was impossible to gaze open-eyed at either the water or the sky. But the nigger oarsman, in his ragged white, pulled a rapid, powerful stroke, and managed also to maintain a continuous whining monologue, an unceasing jet of information concerning the harbor, the uniqueness of the ‘Flying Fish’, the movements of liners and men-of-war, the rules for approaching the Fever Hospital on Pelican Island, and a thousand other matters.

Mary glanced feverishly ahead, not daring to raise her sun-veil, and resting her eyes from time to time on the dark red of the cushions of the boat. Oxwich was by her side in the roomy stern-sheets, but at a proper distance. Presently he took a pair of eye-glasses from his pocket, lit a match, and smoked them.

“Excuse me, miss,” he said apologetically, assuming the pince-nez which had been his aid when, in less crowded hours, he studied the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

DOUBLOONS

"Easy," he commanded the boatman.

They were within a couple of hundred yards of a small and rather unkempt vessel across whose stern could now be plainly deciphered the legend: "White Rose", London." She was swinging round to the flood-tide. Her gangway was down, the lowest step almost awash, and a dinghy bobbed on the waves near her forefoot, pulling at its painter like a young puppy. No other ships were in this quarter of the bay. A solitary figure hung, apparently in a listless attitude, over the stern-rail of the "White Rose." Presently this figure could be discerned to raise a marine glass and examine the 'Flying Fish'.

"Easy ahead," said Oxwich.

"Yes, sar, yes, sar," droned the oarsman. "You want me to hail dis ship, sar? Lady want me to hail dis ship?"

"No," said Oxwich, looking at Mary.

Mary's eyes were fixed on the "White Rose's" taffrail. And under the fire of those marine glasses which the figure held, she actually blushed.

"Oxwich," she said, "is that Mr. Masters?" Her voice shook.

"Yes, miss," said Oxwich succinctly. "Thank Heaven it is! A nice surprise we shall have for Sir Anthony. I think Mr. Masters has recognized us — you, I mean, miss." And then to the boatman: "Go ahead, boy!"

The figure on the deck of the yacht waved a hand in a gesture that seemed to resemble a gesture of adieu, and disappeared from view.

"He'll meet us on the gangway, miss," said Oxwich. "Pull with your left, boy, with your left — not your right."

DOUBLOONS

But the gangway was slowly drawn up by hands invisible from the boat.

"What does that mean?" Mary asked nervously.

"We shall soon know, miss," was all Oxwich's reply.

The 'Flying Fish' grazed the side of the yacht, which towered high above.

"Ship ahoy!" yelled the nigger in a cornet blast.

No answer.

"'White Rose,' ahoy!"

Again no answer. But near the boat, out of a vent in the battered flank of the steamer, water suddenly burst forth and poured in a regular stream as thick as a man's arm, splashing into the sea. The effect was uncanny.

"Mr. Masters!" cried Oxwich loudly, standing up.

No answer, nothing but the outpouring of waste water. The boat slowly made the circuit of the ship, passing by the empty dinghy, and round the taut anchor chain; and they discovered nothing. Repeated shouts availed naught. The steamer might have been uninhabited, abandoned, cursed. There was no means of boarding her; the gangway being horizontal, just out of reach.

"You are sure that *was* Mr. Masters?" Mary murmured, her throat dry.

"I am quite sure, miss."

"Then what are we to do?"

"We are to go back ashore, miss, and report, if that is agreeable to you," said Oxwich, with terrible solemnity.

When they arrived at the Careenage, they found a group consisting of Sir Anthony, Mrs. Appleby, and Horace; and

DOUBLOONS

Horace was waving a handkerchief to the occupant of a boat that had just left the quay. Horace plunged into a recital of how the occupant of the boat had undoubtedly saved his life with a revolver. Tony, as he handed Mary out of the 'Flying Fish', asked anxiously where she had been.

"To the 'White Rose,'" she said.

Tony's face was a study, and a painful one. He had to describe his late doings as best he could. He finished by stating without conviction that the stranger whom Coco had mistaken for Walter Pollexfen was going over to the "Rhine," and would return in twenty minutes, as the "Rhine" was about to sail.

"But the 'Rhine' isn't about to sail, Sir Anthony," said Oxwich; "she's only just come in from St. Vincent. And what's more, he isn't heading for the 'Rhine.' It seems to me he's heading for the 'White Rose.'" In Oxwich's tone disgust had triumphed over the valet in him.

The party on the Careenage had the pleasure of seeing the boat with its occupant merge into the distant mass of the "White Rose," and then the "White Rose" weighed her anchor and leisurely departed from Carlisle Bay. Almost at the same moment Coco, breathless and disheveled, arrived. His activities had been as sterile as Sir Anthony's.

The last blow had yet to fall: it was discovered to be impossible to coal that day. The lighters were all engaged. But late in the evening a watcher on the deck of the "Wanderer" observed a moving train of phosphorus that gleamed and sparkled on the dark water like a host of marine fireflies. It had come slowly southwards from a point where lights

DOUBLOONS

indicated vessels at anchor, and it was approaching the "Wanderer." It could only signify the passage of a boat. It drew nearer, and there was heard the sound of cautious oars, and then a voice. A boat touched the "Wanderer's" gangway.

"Who is it?" demanded the watcher fearfully. "Who is there?"

"It is I," rose the answer from the water.—"Masters."

XXVIII

THE AMBASSADOR

THE white figure of Mary Pollexfen, with black velvet belt and black also at the wrists, stood leaning anxiously forward at the head of the gangway, one hand on the rail, the other at her heart. Below, in the deep shadow of the yacht's side, the swaying oval of a small boat was vaguely silhouetted against the sea's wavy phosphorescence. In the boat two forms could be discerned, and one of these uprose, detaching itself from the dinghy, and mounted cautiously the steps. Mary put out a hand in impulsive welcome, and caught the hand of Philip Masters. He reached the deck, and she still held his hand, and they peered silently into each other's faces at close quarters; the crescent moon was obscured, and some tracts of stars too, and the lanterns in the yacht's masts threw only a feeble gleam.

"Then you did not sail away in the 'White Rose'?" she murmured at last.

"Yes," he whispered, "but she has put back."

"What for?" the girl inquired, in sudden fear.

"Coal."

It seemed as if something compelled them to speak in an undertone. Their voices were tense, constrained. The yacht's

DOUBLOONS

deck stretched somber and deserted about them, the bridge dimly outlined over their heads. No one on board appeared to be awake save themselves, but a radiance from the sky light of the main saloon gave hint of life below. A little pause ensued. Mary could feel her heart beating violently, and she wondered what thoughts were passing through his brain as he fronted her in the midst of the vast, mysterious southern night.

"You have escaped!" she breathed at length. "I knew you would! Yet this morning —"

Perceiving that she had forgotten to loose his hand, she loosed it, as though it had been hot metal.

"I have not escaped," he muttered. "As for this morning —"

"Not escaped?"

"No. I — I'm a prisoner on parole. I did not expect to see you here to-night. I did not mean to see you. It was Tony that I wanted to — But I'm glad it was you who met me. Tremendously glad! I can't tell you how glad. I see now that I can talk to you better than to Tony. And yet a moment ago I fancied I should be ashamed to face you. As a matter of fact, I am. But I don't care, I don't care. It's so splendid to see you like this."

"Ashamed?" she queried. "Ashamed to meet me? What do you mean?"

"Listen."

And he related to her the interview on the Thames that had ended in the compact by which he had saved his life.

"So it was for money after all that my villainous uncle did it!" she said fiercely. "Ah! If —"

DOUBLOONS

She broke off and remained silent.

"Well?" he pressed her. "It was a shameful compact I made? I ought to have taken the risks, oughtn't I? I have often thought so since. I have connived at a crime! I'm what the lawyers call accessory after the fact!"

"You did right," she said slowly "a thousand times right. If you had refused the offer you would only have increased our sorrow to no purpose. Some men would have sacrificed their lives; they would have been brave, but they would have been more foolish than brave. Whereas —"

"Whereas I was cowardly and sensible," he put in.

She drew back with a proud gesture.

"Don't talk so," she protested. "Don't laugh at me — I can't bear it. If ever there was a brave man, you are one. Do you imagine that I can't appreciate all the moral courage it demanded on your part to do an unconventional thing? Do you imagine I don't understand that it needs less courage to do the correct stupid thing and die than to act wisely and live?"

"Thank you," he said. "You are kinder to me than I could have been to myself. Thank you."

"See!" she broke forth, "if you offer me thanks, I shall — I shall cry. It is I who have brought you into this trouble. What you have done you did out of sheer sympathy for me. And what can I give in return? It is I who should go down on my knees to you." She stopped, seeming to gasp, and resumed in another and quieter voice: "He confessed, then?"

"Yes; he confessed. But he swore he didn't mean to murder."

"But Varcoe. Didn't he mean to murder Varcoe?"

DOUBLOONS

"He argued that Varcoe's case was different."

"What do you think of him — my uncle?"

"He has a voice like yours," said Philip simply.

"Is that all?"

"It is enough."

"You haven't told me about this morning?" She gazed at him in tender reproach. "Could you not have thrown us a word — one word? You do not know what distress we have been suffering."

"A word would not have sufficed," said Philip. "In any case you could not have come on board. He had given orders. How could I have preached to you in your boat from where I was? No, I did the one thing that I could do. Besides, perhaps I was a little ashamed of my situation, ashamed of being alive under the circumstances. I have become nearly intimate with that murderer, you know. It sounds brutal, but I have. There was no alternative. Fourteen days on a yacht! And Pollexfen the master! What would you have? I'll be honest — there have been moments when I've almost forgotten that he was a criminal. The situation was extraordinary, very extraordinary."

"I can understand," she said softly. "And what is done is done!"

"If I hadn't become, as it were, intimate with him," Philip continued, "I very probably shouldn't be here now. He would never have let me come. And more tragedies might have happened. You know, I'm a very human person, and, after all, I'm not sorry I'm alive. I want to be useful. That's why I've come — like this."

DOUBLOONS

"But after your promise to him, how can you be useful to us?" she asked. "You say you gave your word to do nothing either directly or indirectly against him."

"Of course," he answered. "You may be sure that if he thought I should work against him, he wouldn't have allowed me to leave the yacht. Nor should I have asked permission."

"Then?"

"I don't quite know how to explain to you," he stammered.

"What?" she demanded. "Have I not proved to you that I am capable of understanding? Tell me at once why you are here, if it is not to help us." There was that in her voice which commanded.

"Your poor father is dead," Philip responded, speaking quietly and nervously. "Forgive me — but nothing can bring him to life. His money is gone, but you do not want his money. The past is the past. As you said just now, what is done, is done. Are you a believer in capital punishment? I am not. Are you ready to judge and be judged? I know I'm talking strangely, but my object is to suggest to you on board this yacht that you should abandon Mr. Walter Pollexfen to his own devices — that you don't trouble about him any more. There! Now you have it!"

He sighed heavily.

"With a man like Walter Pollexfen against you," Philip went on, "the risks you are running are tremendous. He'll stop at nothing. He's demonstrated that quite sufficiently already. Nearly anything might happen. It's equivalent to a war — Tony dogging him like this. He's afraid. He knows a lot, but he doesn't know all. He isn't sure if the police here

DOUBLOONS

haven't been cabled to from London. He got a pretty sort of a shock to-day when he found himself sitting beside you and Tony on the balcony of that restaurant — oh, he told me all about it — and so he's afraid. Hence he agreed to my suggestion that I should come over and urge you to go back to England and — and forget that he had arrived in the West Indies on a secret errand."

"Is it for our sakes or for his that you come, Mr. Ambassador?" said Mary coldly.

"Can you ask?" he returned, desolated. "I came solely because I wish to avoid the possibility of — of — I don't know what. Call it a few more murders if you like. And I would ask you to remember that no matter what occurs, I have given my word to Walter Pollexfen. I may have bought my life too expensively, in spite of what you say, but I *have* bought it, and with my word; the purchase is completed. And I can't ask Pollexfen to give me the price back again. He'd refuse."

"Perhaps," Mary said with an effort, "you had better talk to Sir Anthony. This is his yacht: I'm only a guest."

"But you came!" he exclaimed eagerly. "You came! You came to help to find me!"

"It was a suggestion of Mrs. Appleby's," she explained in an even voice, and then more warmly: "Of course, I wanted to come very badly. But do go down and talk to Sir Anthony; he is alone in the drawing-room."

"I shall startle him."

"That will do him good. He is very depressed; he suspects that he has not covered himself with glory to-day." She smiled with a slightly satiric indulgence.

DOUBLOONS

"You aren't coming down, too?"

"Presently," she said. "You men will talk better alone."

"Where is the drawing-room?"

She guided him to the companion-way, and he faded into the lower gloom. Then she crossed the deck slowly and leaned over the rail, and tears were in her eyes. But whether they were tears of joy or sorrow, of hope or despair, none could have told in that moment, not even she. She knew only that she was profoundly moved.

Behind her, a figure emerged stealthily from the shadow of the funnel. It was Coco, who had been appointed sole watchman for the earlier half of that night. Not another soul of the crew was astir. He glanced at Mary an instant, appeared to reflect, and then, with exaggerated precautions against noise, he descended after Philip.

XXIX

AUCHENGRAY'S SECOND SIGHT

“**H**ULLO, Tony!” said Philip, with an affectation of imperturbable calm: he stood at the door of the drawing-room saloon, holding aside the green portière with one hand. Sir Anthony was seated at the little Broadwood piano, absently engaged in the infantile game of pushing down the keys without making a sound. One of Mrs. Appleby’s most emotional songs, “O Dry Those Tears” was open on the music-stand. The baronet turned, saw Philip, grasped the fact that it really was Philip, and then vented his first explosion of surprise in a terrific oath, involving himself, and beginning with the first person singular of the present tense of an auxiliary verb. Nothing but that particular oath would have met the case.

He strode half-way across the floor, then stopped, and deliberately repeated the oath.

Whereupon they met and shook hands.

It is difficult for complex and self-observant souls to behave quite naturally under stress of such strange meetings, but Tony’s soul was simple, and he behaved with perfect naturalness. His pleasure and satisfaction and curiosity expressed themselves freely and naïvely, and the greatest of these was perhaps his satisfaction. He forgot instantly the failure

DOUBLOONS

of the day and the list of his stupidities, and saw only that he had traversed half the world to find Philip, and had found him. His opinion of himself flew up like a flag, and he honestly thought that Sir Anthony was one of the cleverest fellows on earth.

"Well, well, old chap!" he buzzed glowingly round Philip. "You see I got your famous salver all right, and came after you at once. And here we are! Well, well! Came straight to you. Scent breast high, upon my word. Now tell me how you got aboard. You gave me a rare start!"

"I want a drink," said Philip, dropping into a chair.

"Of course you do. Oxwich! I'll ring for Oxwich."

And he rang. The electric bell was out of order, but a sufficiently loud silver gong stood on a side-table with a lot of bottles and glasses.

The demeanor of Oxwich, who, entering with extreme quietude, saw Philip before Philip saw him, was a pleasing study in self-control. He had the heroism to display no symptom of even the mildest surprise until Philip spoke to him.

"Glad to see you again, Oxwich."

"Very kind of you, sir. I am more than glad to see you, sir." That was all. He rubbed his hands slowly.

"Whisky-and-soda, eh?" Tony questioned abruptly.

Philip nodded.

"Whisky-and-soda. Yes, sir," said Oxwich, going to the side-table. He turned his head, and inquired with steady features: "Stiff, Mr. Masters?"

"Stiff, Oxwich."

"Mine, too, Oxwich," said Sir Anthony.

DOUBLOONS

"I may as well tell you at once," said Philip, taking the glass ceremoniously offered by Oxwich, "I can't stop here. I've got to go back. I'm only here on leave. I must get away again to the other yacht. Oxwich, will you refill my glass? Thanks."

He then succinctly gave the information which he had already imparted to Mary.

"Why man, you're mad!" Tony exclaimed

"Am I?" said Philip. "And what would you do in my place? Break your word?"

"Another, sir?" Oxwich mildly asked.

"No, thanks."

"Do you hear this, Oxwich?" the baronet cried. "Mr. Masters intends to go back to that scoundrel, and, what's more, he wants us to give up the expedition." His accent on the word "expedition" narrowly escaped the sublime.

"Yes, sir, I hear," said Oxwich. "It's a pity, sir, a great pity!"

"But listen, Oxwich," Philip argued, addressing the man instead of the master. "You know enough of Pollexfen to know how dangerous the thing is. Sir Anthony has no idea what he is going in for."

"Might I ask, sir, what this Pollexfen is going in for?" Oxwich observed.

"Treasure," said Philip. "And he means to get it, and to get all of it."

"In the immediate district, sir?"

"At the Grand — No, I cannot talk about that. I was forgetting my promise."

DOUBLOONS

"Just so, sir. You stopped just in time, didn't you, sir?"

"And you must remember," said Philip, glancing at Tony, "that you've got ladies on board."

"Leave 'em ashore, here," Tony returned.

"If I may venture to say so, sir," Oxwich remarked, "I doubt whether the ladies would consent to be left. But on the other hand, I do not see the danger. Considering that the 'Wanderer' is guaranteed to steam thirteen knots, and can really steam twelve, whereas it appears that the 'White Rose' can only steam eight, I do not see the danger — at any rate, to those who remain on board the 'Wanderer.' If I have read aright the lessons of the last naval manoeuvres, we should always be able to choose our distance."

"Yes, of course," said Sir Anthony; "that's exactly what I was thinking. Nothing can prevent us from keeping Pollexfen in sight, and we run no risk in doing so."

"That depends," said Philip.

"What does it depend on?"

"It depends on Pollexfen. I've not spent a fortnight with him for nothing. Are the police on his track, too? Because I back him to be equal to outwitting both you and the police also."

Tony blushed at mention of the police. He had not quite forgotten his hoodwinking of the morn.

"The police have been informed," said he awkwardly, "but they would have nothing to do with my expedition. I expect they are still poking about London to find Pollexfen."

"Just like 'em," Philip observed. "Now, old chap, to business. You've decided you won't give up the job."

DOUBLOONS

Sir Anthony glanced at Oxwich, at whom he always glanced when he wanted inspiration.

"I'm d — d if I do," said Sir Anthony. "I'll see it through. Pollexfen may get his precious treasure, but what's he going to do with it when he gets it? We'll follow him everywhere, till we can put him in jail."

"Pardon the liberty, sir," Oxwich put in. "But do you believe everything that everybody tells you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, about this treasure story. It seems to me it's rather late in Anno Domini for a smart chap like this Pollexfen to be hunting for treasure. If he's really serious, he must have slipped by accident into the wrong century."

"I neither believe nor disbelieve," Philip answered. "I know Pollexfen is one of the greatest actors alive. And I admit him to be capable of deceiving anyone about anything. But still I incline to the opinion that he has not deceived me on this point, and that he is certainly searching for doubloons."

"Doubloons!" Sir Anthony repeated the gorgeous word, impressed.

"And my notion is that when a man like Pollexfen is seriously searching for doubloons, and has committed a homicide or so in furtherance of his quest, doubloons are likely to be about. . . . You don't think so, Oxwich?"

"To be frank, sir," said Oxwich, "I do not."

"I was of your opinion at first, Oxwich." He looked at his watch. "Time's up," he said.

"But how are you going back? You won't have one of *our* boats, my son, I can promise you," said Sir Anthony.

DOUBLOONS

“‘White Rose’s’ boat waiting alongside. Good-by! Good luck! I’m glad you’ve decided not to give up. What I really came over for was to explain my position to you!” He took Tony affectionately by the shoulder. “I shall be all right. I’ve made my bed, and I fancy I can lie on it. See one another again when this little affair is over. Au revoir, Oxwich.” And he shook Oxwich’s unwilling hand.

There was a certain amount of feeling in the air.

“I suppose you’ve heard of *force majeure*, sir?” Oxwich remarked tranquilly.

“Vaguely,” Philip smiled. “Why?”

“You are going back to that rascal in the ‘White Rose,’ sir, if I may say so, in pursuance of a promised word. You gave your oath you wouldn’t do anything against him, and you gave your oath to return.”

“I did.”

“Well, sir, there’s an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that says that an oath or promise given under *force majeure*, if I may use the term, is not binding, either morally or legally.”

Philip laughed.

“That’s not good enough, my friend,” said he. “You have the advantage of me as regards the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. But you know I’m an Englishman.”

“I rather expected you would say that, sir,” Oxwich rejoined. “And I didn’t suppose that that sort of an encyclopaedia argument would appeal to you, but”—he turned to his master —“there’s another sort of *force majeure*, and another sort of argument, Sir Anthony, that *will* appeal to Mr.

DOUBLOONS

Masters, even if he's an Englishman, fifty times over. As I am myself, sir."

"What's that?"

"The brute force argument, sir, if I may say so. Mr. Masters might be prevented from leaving the yacht. *We* have given no promise to this Pollexfen person. We owe no explanations to this Pollexfen person. We didn't ask Mr. Masters to come on board — excuse me, sir, I'm sure I'm delighted you've come."

"By Jove, Oxwich" — Sir Anthony stamped his feet — "that's just what I was thinking myself. Why should we let Mr. Masters go? We won't let you go, old man. Consider yourself our prisoner. We'll keep you."

It was as if a thunderstorm had suddenly gathered its forces around them and was about to break.

"Will you?" said Philip queerly. "I think not."

"Oh, nonsense!" the baronet laughed awkwardly. "Come, old man; you'll give yourself up." And he seized his arm.

"Loose me," said Philip, flushing. "Loose me! Don't be a fool. What kind of a position would you put me in?"

"I don't think that Mr. Masters's feelings ought to be taken into account, Sir Anthony. Of course, he must struggle. We recognize that. But you and I, sir, will be too many for him."

The two men closed on Philip, who fought desperately and with swift anger.

"Do you think I'm struggling for the sake of struggling?" he exclaimed. "Let me go. It's disgraceful. I've promised, and my promise has got to be kept."

DOUBLOONS

"That's it, sir," said Oxwich, breathing hard. "Stick to his arm. We can lock him up in the smoking-room, sir."

As Oxwich spoke these words, a slight sound came from the smoking-room which communicated with the drawing-room; but the three men were too deeply absorbed themselves to hear it. The battle waged hotly; two chairs were overturned; a glass rolled off a stricken table and found disaster on the carpet.

And then Sir Anthony caught sight of a figure in the doorway at the opposite end of the saloon from the smoking-room, and he instinctively desisted from the attack. Mary Pollexfen stood there, pale in her white dress against the dark background. She was motionless; she might have been there a long time.

"What are you doing, Sir Anthony?" she asked in a faltering voice, and stepped forward into the room.

Oxwich collected himself and assumed the valet's posture, but his cravat was accusingly untied.

"We — we're stopping Phil from running off," replied the baronet.

"And does Mr. Masters want to be stopped?"

"No, I don't," said Philip, with fierce emphasis. "I don't, and I won't be!"

"I may be wrong, Sir Anthony," Mary said, "but I think Mr. Masters ought to decide."

She was glorious in that instant, with dilated nostrils, eyes flashing, and arm regally uplifted.

"But, Miss Pollexfen, if I may venture —" Oxwich began.

"Oxwich!" his master thundered.

DOUBLOONS

"Good-by," said Philip. "Miss Pollexfen, I'm deeply and for ever in your debt. Good-by!"

He passed out of the saloon and up the companion, and the others followed in silence. It was a singular scene, peculiarly illustrative of the English character. The moment the saloon was empty, Coco came into it from the smoking-room.

Five minutes later those on the deck of the "Wanderer" followed with their eyes a moving train of phosphorescence as it receded mysteriously over the water to the dying plash of oars. The captain and crew had slept through the episode the righteous sleep of honest tars safe in port.

The next morning at six o'clock the "Wanderer" was coaling, and Captain Chetwode in a bad temper, as captains invariably are during such operations. It was observed that the "White Rose" also was coaling, and since she could be satisfied with less coal than the "Wanderer" she had finished first, and she was off westwards.

Sir Anthony, his nerves afflicted by the experience of the night, requested Captain Chetwode to keep her in sight much as he might have told the driver of one cab in Piccadilly to follow another cab in Piccadilly. And Captain Chetwode, ever on the watch for an insult, resented the instruction. What he resented more than the instruction was the air of mystery that surrounded Sir Anthony, Mary, and Oxwich. In spite of his admirable pretense of having no curiosity, he hated to be kept out of a secret. The boy Horace and the boy's mother had not yet awakened.

Just before weighing anchor a remarkable discovery was

DOUBLOONS

made. Had it been made in the manner in which it was meant to have been made, the result would have been serious. Happily marine engineers have a flair in regard to their machinery which amounts to the magic of second-sight. Some mysterious impulse prompted Auchengray to send a boat round to inspect the screw. Why should he have done so? There was no reason, save that he was a marine engineer, and Auchengray. It then became apparent that some person unknown had wound a one-inch chain cable round the rudder-post and round two blades of the propeller. The trick had been accomplished with malignant ingenuity, in such manner that one revolution of the engines would certainly have smashed or fatally twisted the blades of the propeller. But for Auchengray's flair the yacht might have been laid up in Bridgetown for a week or a month. As it was, the delay did not exceed an hour.

XXX

A STOWAWAY

MR. Walter Pollexfen left Carlisle Bay on board his "White Rose" in an amiable and self-satisfied condition of mind. He had, not without risks, immensely amused himself on the previous day. And for the future he had made his arrangements. Mr. Pollexfen was not cursed with a Captain Chetwode. To execute his orders he possessed a negative individual named Marple, of whom all that could be said was that he had the Board of Trade certificate. And it is not to be supposed that the "White Rose" was manned by a "cut-throat crew." It these days, treasure-hunting expeditions — even those that get themselves reported in the daily papers — are not conducted after the fashion of the time when the Spanish Main *was* the Spanish Main. Captain Marple was merely a failure in life, and neither he nor any of his Anglo-Swedish tars knew what Mr. Walter Pollexfen was about, nor had the least financial interest in the enterprise. Mr. Walter Pollexfen was rather a favorite with them all — largely on account of the charming manner in which he tried to console them for the painful shortcomings of the "White Rose" as a yacht.

The "White Rose" had one good quality left — she was clean. Long ago, perhaps in the epoch when the

DOUBLOONS

"Alaska" was the fashionable greyhound of the Atlantic, the "White Rose" might possibly have had the right to deem herself middle-aged. But only a poet could have imagined that she had ever been young. To call up the scene of her launching would have been a feat of fancy surpassing even the powers of a poet. And now the "White Rose" was inconceivably and dishonorably senile. Nevertheless, Mr. Walter Pollexfen was more than usually convinced that morning that she would suffice for his purposes. He chatted gaily with Philip, teasing him about the futility of the nocturnal expedition to the "Wanderer." He had a cocktail with Marple. He saluted the "Rhine," and dipped his ensign to H.M.S. "Irreconcilable," which had just come to Bridgetown for the customary purpose of giving a ball.

But there were surprises for Mr. Walter Pollexfen. Pelican Island had not sunk below the Eastern horizon before a stowaway was brought to him. He was breakfasting in the fore-cabin with Philip. The stowaway was a grinning negro, slightly obese and somewhat aged, and two A.B.'s introduced him with the Captain's compliments. His face was blue-black with coal-dust.

"Well, my man, said Pollexfen, "to what do I owe this unexpected honor?"

"I'se Massa Coco, sir," the negro replied, still grinning.

Pollexfen abruptly twisted his chair round on its pivot and gazed into Coco's face, which Philip had immediately recognized.

"I verily believe you are," said Pollexfen, in a different tone. With a gesture he dismissed the two A.B.'s.

DOUBLOONS

"He certainly is," Philip remarked nervously, wondering what the sudden apparition might portend. He tried to catch in the negro's play of feature some message to himself, but Coco seemed to avoid his glance.

"So you've come aboard to present the kind regards of the 'Wanderer,' eh?" Pollexfen suggested.

"I come to see you sah, . . . 'Bout a matter of berry much importance."

"And how did you get here?"

"In a boat, sah. I slipped off de 'Wanderer' into de lighter's dinghy. and den I get anudder boat, and den I come help you to coal, sah, plenty quick, wid udder niggers — not respectable, sah, trash, sah — and den I hide in de fo'castle, sah."

"Then you did not announce to the 'Wanderer' your intention to pay me a prolonged visit?"

"Oh no, sah! No, sah!"

"And what the devil are you after?"

"I've got some berry important information for you, sah. I want to talk to you, sah."

"Well, talk."

"'Scuse me, sah" — he wisted his hands, looking directly at Philip for the first time — "I don't want to talk to nobody but you, sah; it's berry private, sah."

"I see," said Pollexfen. "Well, you go and wash yourself, and then come and talk to me."

"Yes, sah. I'se too sorry I'se so dirty, sah."

"Do you know anything about this?" Pollexfen demanded of Philip, when the negro had gone.

DOUBLOONS

"I know nothing," said Philip. "It's the first time I've seen Coco in this hemisphere."

"He evidently thinks there's more to be made here than in the opposition shop, anyway."

"You mean he's a —"

"Turncoat? Yes. You don't know niggers. He's come to sell me the secrets of the 'Wanderer.' It shows what a fool he is — because I shall buy at my price, not his."

"And what will your price be?"

"Don't know yet."

Philip yawned.

"The 'Wanderer' will be on your track by this time," he said, drinking the last of a cup of the "White Rose's" abominable coffee. He said it gloomily, inconsequently, for want of something to say, and perhaps with an intention to crumple a rose-leaf in Mr. Walter Pollexfen's couch of supreme content. He was very morose.

But Pollexfen laughed.

"Tell me," said he. "How they got on my track to start with. You have doubtless observed that I have refrained from questioning you on that point since I came aboard from this island yesterday; yet my curiosity has been extreme. I was really waiting for a voluntary explanation from you. I presume you have not broken faith with me."

"I have not."

"Moreover, I don't see how you could have done. You haven't had the chance," said Pollexfen reflectively, and added: "Not that I don't trust you. Do you happen to know, then, how they *did* manage to follow me here?"

DOUBLOONS

"I know precisely," said Philip.

"How was it done?"

"I won't tell you," Philip answered with a grim smile. "It's no part of our bargain that I should tell you that."

"As you please," said Pollexfen with imperturbable gaiety, in which was a touch of irony. "But it occurred to me that since these good people on the 'Wanderer' knew I was coming to the West Indies they might also know precisely where in the West Indies; and so I took advantage of our little excursion last night to postpone the 'Wanderer's' departure. That, my dear Mr. Masters, was why I accompanied you in person."

"What?" cried Philip, standing up. "Wh — what did you do?"

And Pollexfen with bland glee explained his contrivance for putting the "Wanderer's" screw out of action. "It may be a day, or it may be a week, or it may be a fortnight before the 'Wanderer' can begin to overtake me," he concluded. "And by that time the enterprise of discovering me in the Caribbean Sea will not be precisely simple. What are you getting yourself excited about?"

"You," Philip ejaculated, pale, "you took advantage of my —!" He could not finish.

These were the last words that Philip ever spoke to Walter Pollexfen.

The young man, white with excitement, walked hastily out of the cabin.

An awning had been rigged up, in a clumsy "White Rose" sort of way, on the after-deck, and under it was Pollexfen's special deck-chair, one leg spliced with tarred twine. Philip

DOUBLOONS

kicked it fiercely away. He set his eyes on the vanishing spot eastwards, which was Barbadoes. And the mere thought of Carlisle Bay, with the "Wanderer" helplessly confined to that harbor like a bird with a broken wing, filled him with a cold and furious anger such as he had never known in his life. He had not broken faith with Pollexfen: he had kept a difficult pact. But Pollexfen had broken faith with him. He had gone, with Pollexfen as his oarsman, on a herald's mission to the "Wanderer," and if he did not actually bear a white flag, at least there had been a metaphorical white flag waving its folds over his head. And Pollexfen had violated the sanctity of that emblem. Pollexfen had seized a villain's and a traitor's opportunity, and had disgraced him for ever in the eyes of his friends. What would Tony think? What would *she* think? They would possibly — or rather, probably, he hoped — tell each other that he, Philip, could have had no hand in the outrage. But that polite belief in his honor did not diminish his responsibility. He had trusted Pollexfen. There lay his fault! There lay his crime! Knowing that Pollexfen was utterly without moral sense, knowing that his mind was as ignorant of scruples as a certain great English Chancellor, he had yet trusted Pollexfen, this murderer, this thief, this prodigy of rascality. He had trusted him!

And Pollexfen regarded the episode as a trifle, as an amusing and ingenious detail of his campaign. He not improbably had no suspicions that he had wounded Philip in his tenderest spot. Anyhow, their mutual agreement, in Philip's estimation, had been definitely canceled by Pollexfen's monstrous act. He was capable, save for an absurd civilized disinclination

DOUBLOONS

to murder — a scruple which the primitive man in him condemned — of taking Pollexfen unawares and throwing him into the sea.

Or he was capable of throwing himself in!

The Caribbean was calm as a lake, and the track of the "White Rose" spread on it eastwards like a river of milk. Then out of a capricious architecture of clouds a tropical shower, swift and violent in accordance with the meteorology of the archipelago, broke and flashed like fire, pouring itself on the flatness of the ocean like a torrent. And over the glittering blue waters, painted on the rain, wide in arc, gleaming with transparent color, framing sea and horizon and sky above, there blazed such a space of prismatic splendor as Philip had never before seen, even amid dreams; and beyond it, on mightier arch, with vaster circumference, hung the pale ghost of another rainbow greater than the first. Philip gazed, spellbound, his spirit enchanted by the magic into a strange and fervid calm.

And when the wrack had cleared away, and the sun shone as though the storm had never been and could never be, and the water percolated through the ragged awning and steamed off the sodden deck, Philip, still gazing eastwards at the island sinking further and further below the verge, saw in the distance the gray curl of a steamer's smoke. He wondered if after all the "Wanderer" might have escaped calamity and was in pursuit. He was profoundly thankful that Tony and Mary were acquainted with the ultimate object of the journey. The curl of smoke grew larger. He knew that the vessel could not, at any rate, be the "Rhine."

DOUBLOONS

In two hours the approaching steamer had gained eight miles on the "White Rose," and Philip had scarcely taken eyes off her. He fancied that she was the "Wanderer," but as she came end on it was extremely difficult to judge her lines. At last he borrowed a glass from the mate, who throughout the voyage had shown himself friendly. The glass, like everything on the "White Rose," was second-rate and inefficient, and did not help him much. Sometimes he thought he could distinguish the white funnel and the two masts of the "Wanderer," and the next moment he decided that he was mistaken.

And then, after another hour, it suddenly occurred to him that the pursuing vessel was no longer pursuing. She had ceased to overhaul the "White Rose"; she must have slowed down in order to keep her distance.

It was the "Wanderer"! What other ship would crowd on all steam, and then moderate her pace to the tedious crawl of Pollexfen's ancient tub? It was the "Wanderer"! The scoundrel's trick had failed.

But its failure did not wipe out the stigma from his infamous intention.

Philip began to wonder what had become of Pollexfen and Coco.

XXXI

DEPARTURE

WHEN Coco, cleaned, returned to the cabin, Walter Pollexfen was alone there to meet him. The blinking old negro made queer nervous gestures with his hands, smoothing down his jacket, and smiling in a peaceable, deprecating way.

"Now, my man," said Pollexfen, with abrupt severity, "what is it?"

"You know all 'bout me, sah?"

"I know nothing about you, except that you look like a lunatic."

"No, sah! No, sah! I not a lunatic; you tinkin' ob my brudder. You 'member me one day at de Obelisk Hotel, sah, when I came wid de Captain. You and de Captain spoke berry sharp, sah."

Coco had ceased to smile.

"Of course, I am aware that you were the Captain's servant. Well?"

"About dat treasure, sah."

"Well?"

"I'se left de udder ship, sah."

"Look here, Coco," exclaimed Pollexfen, "if you don't come straight to the point, I'll make you wish you had never left the other ship."

DOUBLOONS

Coco's hands were working.

"I know all 'bout dat treasure, sah," he whined.

"You've seen it?"

"No, sah. I never seen it. De Captain never seen it. But I know more dan you know, sah, about dat treasure. I told ebberbody in London dat I know **nothing**. Den de gem'man he bring me ober, an' I help de cook — I berry good cook, sah, myself, sah —"

In a sudden rage Pollexfen picked up a knife, with which he had recently been cutting the crust off some bread, and flung it violently at Coco. The haft caught the negro on the shoulder, harmlessly, and there was a clatter on the floor of the cabin. Coco trembled, then wept gently.

"Bring it to me," said Pollexfen.

The negro shook his head.

"Bring it to me, I say."

And Coco brought the knife and laid it hastily on the corner of the table.

"Let that teach you," Pollexfen laughed. "Keep to the point. Now, then. You say you know more about the treasure than I do. What do you know?"

Coco hesitated.

"De treasure not where you tink it is, sah," he said in a complaining voice. "I come to tell you."

"Well, tell me then."

"What are you going to gib me, sah?" he shuffled about on his large feet.

"I'll see about that after you've told me," said Pollexfen easily.

DOUBLOONS

"Then I say nuffin, sah," Coco remarked with newly-found calm.

"You've come on board my ship, my man," Pollexfen said, staring fiercely at the negro. "I didn't ask you to come. But now you are here, you've got to speak. I shall make you. There are more ways than one of making a nigger talk."

"Only one way to make Massa Coco talk, sah!" droned Coco, still calm. "Massa Coco an ole, ole man. If he can't hab money, he want nudding. He just die."

Pollexfen appeared to be somewhat perplexed by the demeanor of his visitor. He had never seen a negro behave in such wise before, and the phenomenon disturbed him.

"You not make me speak, sah!" Coco remarked cheerfully. "You kill me — den you never find dat treasure."

"Ah!" said Pollexfen. "So that is our line, is it? Well, assuming that you do tell me something that is really useful to me, what are your modest demands?"

"Hundred poun's," Coco answered quietly.

"A trifle! A nothing!" Pollexfen observed. "It would keep you to the end of your days. Why don't you ask for a million?"

Coco grinned.

"Hundred poun's," he repeated.

"We shall see," said Pollexfen. "We shall see."

"I don't want it now, sah," Coco explained.

"You're too kind."

"You tink treasure in de Grand Etang, sah?"

"Yes."

"*Where* in de Grand Etang?"

Pollexfen arose from his chair and approached Coco.

DOUBLOONS

"The Captain used to tell you everything, eh?" he questioned familiarly.

"Yes, sah."

"He showed you his plans of the Grand Etang, eh?"

"No, sah; 'cause Massa Coco not understand plans, sah. But he tell me ebbeyting. Where you tink treasure is in de Grand Etang, sah?"

With apparent reluctance Pollexfen drew a paper from his pocket, and read therefrom the description of a locality tallying, though it was differently worded, with that which he had given to Philip on the night of their historic compact.

"Yes, sah! Yes, sah!" sighed Coco. "Dat was it; I 'member. But the Captain knew afterwards dat de treasure had been moobed. He told me 'xactly, sah."

"Oh! It had been moved? What then?"

"I can't explain dat, sah. But I been to de Grand Etang plenty times long ago. De Captain he been too. So he tell me and he make me understand. I go wid you to de Grand Etang, sah. An' if you find de treasure where you say, den you gib me nudding. If de treasure not dere, and I show you where it is, den you gib me hundred poun's, sah."

"How nicely you've arranged it all, haven't you?"

"Yes, sah."

"You must have lain awake at nights thinking this out, Coco."

"Yes, sah," said the negro emphatically. "Plenty nights."

"Very well," Pollexfen agreed after a little pause; "you and I will go up there alone."

"Yes, sah. Alone!" the negro concurred.

DOUBLOONS

"You shall show me the way. We'll have quite a pleasant little excursion."

"When, sah?" Coco inquired apprehensively.

"To-morrow morning."

Coco's face lost its anxiety. "Yes, sah. Morning. Dat is de best. Morning."

"And now you can go away and play," said Pollexfen. "I'm busy, and you're interrupting me."

It was not till the afternoon that Philip, who had made a meal of Barbadian fruits, saw Walter Pollexfen on deck; and then he took pains to avoid Mr. Pollexfen. He felt as though he could scarcely trust himself to speak to the man. Pollexfen's busy and inquiring eye soon noted the ship that followed the "White Rose." Philip saw him use a glass, then shrug his shoulders, then go below for a space. Shortly after his return to the deck, a change began to occur in the relative positions of the two yachts. Once more the "Wanderer" came ahead. At four o'clock she was not a mile behind the "White Rose," and her identity stood forth plainly revealed. She now again accommodated her pace to that of the pursued, eight or nine knots an hour. Philip's gaze never left her, but he could observe nothing on her upper deck, which appeared to be as lifeless in the heavy sunshine as the deck of the "White Rose."

Grenada, fairest of the Lesser Antilles and the chief jewel in the necklace of the Caribbean, was in sight, and, as the minutes passed, the mountains and valleys of this lovely island spread themselves out more and more clearly. The scenery, wilder and grander than that of Barbadoes, struck the vision by reason of the intensity of its coloring and the

DOUBLOONS

variety of its form. Cloud-capped peaks, clothed from beach to hill-top with richest foliage, smiled upon the eye; nothing was barren or naked. Rich wildernesses of arboreal wealth covered the land in gorgeous coats of many tints; with luxuriant medley and tangle and prodigal confusion of tropic forest; with blinding light and purple shade; with blossoms of crimson and gold; with untold fullness of life glorying in the fiery heat. In the acclivities that sloped upwards from the shore, only separated from the sea by a strip of silvery beach, grew great groves of cocoanut palms. These tended aloft where gullies and winding roadways broke the uprising line of forest.

And soon, on nearer approach, as the yacht skirted the southern capes of the isle, little dwellings scattered themselves upon the hillsides, peeping, like faces, out of the surrounding trees; from point to point, above the masses of vegetation which rounded every eminence, a palm sprang upwards; ever higher and higher, even to the curling mists of cloudland, could they still be seen, faint and dim, crowning each great billow of the forest. Bright slopes of sugar-cane similarly tended to the topmost peaks. Here and there crimson flame flowers of *bois immortelle* lighted the hills; elsewhere stood forth other lofty trees, gleaming white on stem and bough. Volcanic crags sometimes jutted upwards, gray against the green. The mountains were torn by steep precipices and chasms; but the wounded nudity of them appeared not, for they were fringed with foliage, laced and curtained with flowing creepers, gemmed with a thousand splashes of blazing color.

DOUBLOONS

Such was the island. And the thought in each heart on board the two yachts was that somewhere, mysteriously hidden amid the central heights, the dead waters of the Grand Etang sunned themselves in the full radiance of heaven, guarding their sinister secret.

Somewhat before dusk the "Wanderer" rapidly overhauled the "White Rose" and passed her at the speed of a man walking fast. Three cables' lengths separated the ships. To Philip, as his eyes studied in vain the stately yacht, there was something strange and terrible in her silent passing. It seemed to be a portent, to give birth in him to a nameless foreboding. He could descry no soul on her decks, save an officer on the bridge. Her awnings hung in lifeless folds. She slid over the sea with that grave, unhurried air of advancing to an inevitable destiny which ships alone can assume.

He wondered what they who had charge of her meant to do. At one moment he had an impulse to plunge into the sea in order to join her. Nothing bound him to the "White Rose" now. The other yacht forged ahead leaving the "White Rose" behind in the shadow of her smoke. She gained a mile, and then slowed down.

Pollexfen was on the bridge of the "White Rose" talking earnestly to the Captain. And Philip noticed that the "White Rose" was going at only half-speed. At length the "Wanderer" made the last headland east of St. George, and disappeared slowly behind it. Instantly the "White Rose's" engines were at full speed again, and she was describing a great curve shorewards.

A village lay on the edge of the blue waters, under the

DOUBLOONS

shadow of many palms. It was Goyave. The "White Rose" went dead slow, her engines stopped, and she floated motionless a mile from the little agglomeration of houses. Orders were shouted to lower a boat. Philip puzzled to know what was to happen next, and especially what would be his own share in the events of the night. Pollexfen hastened down from the bridge; then Philip heard the whining voice of Massa Coco raised in a forlorn protest.

"Not at night, sah!"

"Yes, now!" was Pollexfen's peremptory reply.

"You said to-morrow morning!"

"Down with you!" commanded Pollexfen. "It isn't as if I was not coming, too. What does it matter, night or morning?"

"The Obi!" whined Coco ineffectually.

The next minute the boat left the side of the "White Rose." Pollexfen was rowing, and Massa Coco sat in the stern-sheets. Dusk fell with the startling rapidity of the tropics. Before the boat could have reached the shore both it and the village had disappeared in the gloom. A light shone in the village, and two others far up the hillside.

Then the "White Rose's" engines resumed their leisurely beat. The yacht had put about, and was steaming eastwards away from St. George and in the direction of Barbadoes. Filled with a sudden resolution Philip ran up to the bridge, where an oil lamp burnt foully.

"Where are we going?" he demanded of Captain Marple.

"Eastward, sir, eastward!"

"But where?"

"Just eastward, Mr. Masters."

DOUBLOONS

"Well, put her about again, at once," said Philip firmly, "And make for St. George."

"Impossible, sir! I have Mr. Pollexfen's orders to go eastwards and to return here to-morrow morning for further orders."

"Mr. Pollexfen is no longer the director of this ship's movements," said Philip angrily. "Put her about and make for St. George, or, by Heaven, you'll wish you'd never been born."

He seized hold of the innocent and inoffensive Captain's right arm in two places and operated a twist.

"And not a word!" he added with a menace.

"Of course, if you put it like that," the Captain stammered, "I've no alternative but to agree."

And he rang the warning to the engine-room to stand by. It sounded on the night like some agreed signal in a conspiracy.

XXXII

AN EXPEDITION

“**Y**OU can do precisely what you like with your ship, Captain Marple,” said Philip Masters with some cheerfulness.

He was descending the side of the “White Rose,” which he had caused to be anchored off St. George, the capital of Grenada. The little land-locked, palm-skirted bay, one of the most picturesque in the Antilles, could not be seen in the gloom, but the lights of the prison and of the lunatic asylum on the summit of Richmond Hill made a pretty show. The tangle of shore boats that had come out to greet and despoil the “White Rose” surrounded her with a girdle of shrill noise and gesticulatory appeal. In the confusion Philip stepped into two boats at once, and was the innocent origin of apparently terrible feuds between rivals owners of trans-harbor lines.

“To the ‘Wanderer,’” said Philip. “You know her?”

“Yes, sah; yes, sah!” answered a white-clad darkey. “Most powerful yacht, sah. Came in ’bout an hour ago, sah.”

Besides the electric illumination of the “Wanderer” there were to be observed the lights of another large ship not far away.

DOUBLOONS

"She's been there days and days," said the negro, in reply to a query of Philip. "She's a Russian ship, sah."

The boat shot low and fast in the night breeze over the phosphorescent water, and in three minutes Philip, having satisfied the unscrupulous cupidity of his boatman, was boarding the "Wanderer" for the second time in twenty-four hours. The first person to greet him, by a curious chance, was Mrs. Appleby, who had dressed early for dinner, and was gamboling with her son near the gangway.

She screamed as she recognized him.

"Oh! Mr. Masters!" she exclaimed, "I do hope there's nothing wrong. Horace, run and fetch your uncle."

There are sundry passages in the Pollexfen adventure which Philip is probably destined to remember as long as he remembers anything, but nothing will remain more securely fixed in his brain than that chance exclamation of a startled Mrs. Appleby. "I hope there is nothing wrong."

And then she added, lamely:

"I mean —"

What she did mean did not achieve utterance.

"Delighted to see you again, Mrs. Appleby," said Philip heartily.

"Oh, yes," said she. "I quite remember our meeting, at Tony's."

And then Tony appeared, followed by Mary Pollexfen, while Horace hovered on the outskirts, regarding Philip as a sort of Monte Cristo escaped from the Chateau d'If. He regretted that Philip had not plunged boldly overboard and swam from yacht to yacht in a sea full of sharks. Neverthe-

DOUBLOONS

less, despite this serious drawback to Philip's glory, he envied Philip more than he had ever envied H. M. Stanley or even W. G. Grace.

Philip grasped the hands of his friends in silence. Nobody was at ease. Nobody seemed to know what to say. Captain Chetwode passed and was introduced, and passed on.

"I can't talk to you here," said Philip hesitatingly. "Let us go down-stairs. It's urgent."

And in the saloon, with the portières drawn, and Horace cruelly excluded:

"So you've changed you mind, old man?" Tony ventured.

"It is Pollexfen," said Philip.

"What! He's given you the sack?"

"No. But after he told me what he'd done to your propeller — I considered that after such a trick I was free — and here I am! The infamousness of it didn't seem to strike him. I hope I needn't assure you all —"

Mary made a step toward him.

"Please," she entreated, with heightened color, "do not trouble to say that. No one imagined for a moment that you had anything to do with it! Besides, not the least harm was done. The chain was discovered in time."

"In fact, it was really rather nice of Mr. Pollexfen to think of doing such a wicked thing," Mrs. Appleby put in. "Because if he hadn't, we shouldn't have the pleasure of Mr. Masters's company now, should we?" She smiled benignly.

"And this time you *have* escaped, eh, old man? And you aren't going back?"

DOUBLOONS

"No," said Philip. "I'm going forward. And I hope you are coming with me."

"Where?"

"To the Grand Etang."

"When?"

"To-night. There isn't a second to be lost."

He told them of the flight of Pollexfen and Massa Coco in the dinghy to Goyave, and learnt that since Coco's surreptitious departure from the "Wanderer" the loss of a revolver had been discovered.

Philip's project for hurrying at once by night to the Grand Etang in pursuit of Pollexfen and the negro roused the latent fire of romance in Tony's breast. Tony accepted the proposition on the spot, and when Mrs. Appleby descanted on the dangers of such an expedition, he snubbed her.

"Don't worry me, child," he said; "I shall go."

Flattered by the infantile appellation, she fell into an awed silence, then swam from the cabin.

The resolve of the men to follow where Pollexfen and Coco had certainly gone, communicated to the entire ship a peculiar atmosphere in which the pulses beat more quickly and even more joyously. There were sundry preparations to make, of which the principal was to gather information concerning the geography of the island. Only one person had ever visited Grenada; that person was Captain Chetwode, and the Captain, on being asked whether he would accompany the expedition in quality of guide, answered first that he had entirely forgotten where the Grand Etang was, second, that he did not care for nocturnal escapades, and third, that he had

DOUBLOONS

no intention whatever of leaving his ship. He indicated that, in the light of recent experiences with his propeller in Carlisle Bay he was ready to be surprised at nothing, and if the ship was to be blown up by a torpedo, he preferred to be on the bridge at the critical moment, and not scouring the Grenada hills by aid of a Chinese lantern. Such was his manner of putting it.

Native boatmen were then summoned. They were volubly eager to earn money, but no offer of gain would induce them to lead the way to the Grand Etang at night. It appeared that a sinister and dreadful Spirit inhabited the waters of the mysterious lake, and that the Spirit had a grudge against negroes. Oxwich it was who, having been summoned originally on the question of food, provided the solution of the difficulty as to guides. He ascertained that though the negroes would not touch the actual shores of the Grand Etang, they would nevertheless approach within a reasonable distance — that is to say, to the extremity of the Spirit's supposed sphere of influence — and that thenceforward the track presented no difficulty. Two negroes were engaged on this understanding. The distance was said to be trifling.

In other details Oxwich proved very valuable, but Oxwich had no mind to quit the ship. As usual he was an advisory council, not a seeker after perilous sensations.

"You aren't coming, then, Oxwich?" Sir Anthony said. They were on deck, and ready to start.

"My place is here, sir, I think. To look after the ladies."

"Yes," said Mary. "You had better stay and look after Mrs. Appleby." Her tone was strange.

DOUBLOONS

"What do you mean, Miss Pollexfen?" Philip demanded.

"I am coming with you," she replied in a cold, firm voice.

"Coming with us! Impossible!"

"Still, I am coming with you."

"Really!" Mrs. Appleby began to protest. She already had enough to do to pacify her son, who did not consider the excursion complete without himself.

And Mary exclaimed passionately:

"I must come! I feel that I must come! I *will* come! Mr. Masters, don't forget 'John Meredith.' Besides, you have both of you been assuring us for the last hour that there is no danger. I promise you I will do as I'm told. But go with you I must. Have I not a better right than any of you to be interested?" Her tones rang across the deck.

"It's madness!" Philip breathed.

"Let it be madness, then!" said she, with a royal gesture, breathing rapidly.

They noticed that she was wearing a tam-o'-shanter, and that she carried a white cloak over her arm.

A figure stepped into the group

"If Miss Pollexfen is going, I will go, too," said Captain Chetwode calmly.

And no one could speak for a moment.

As the party rowed away from the "Wanderer," sobs could be heard in the night. They were the lamentation of Horace, who in the violence of his anger at being excluded had forgotten his sex.

The "White Rose" had sailed away.

XXXIII

THE GRAND ETANG

THE negro guides, driven by the fear of the full moon which would soon rise over the hills to flood the lake and call from its depths the fabled Obi, dreaded Spirit of the Rain, had fled in breathless haste back to the lighted security of St. George. And the party of four, three men and the woman whom they had been powerless to keep back, were approaching the goal of their strange expedition.

Suddenly the path began to fall slightly, and through the nocturnal solitude came to their ears a noise resembling the music of hammers on distant anvils. It was regular, unceasing, and indubitably metallic, and it pierced the night like a shaft of sound. They all stopped instinctively, and listened.

"What's that?" Tony whispered.

"That," said the Captain, "is the blacksmith-frogs of the Grand Etang, if you want to know. They'll keep it up all night. You'll soon get used to it."

Five minutes later, Philip stopped.

"There you are!" he said.

At their very feet was the water, black, awful, mysterious — sullenly reflecting the faint constellations of the sky above. The ray of the men's lanterns seemed to glance off it capriciously,

DOUBLOONS

as a lance might glance off impenetrable armor, leaving the darkness inviolate and terrifying. In the distance of the lake great fireflies darted, flashed their intermittent signals, and, trailing over the surface of the pool, touched the night with phosphorescence. The effect of this play of spangled radiance, to the accompaniment of the frogs' loud and incessant ringing, was like nothing else in human experience. It caused the adventurers to forget for a moment even their adventure, and to humble themselves before the secret works of the Mother, which she performs in far places for herself alone. Save the fireflies and the frogs, there was nought but sleeping life. The huge, moveless fronds of palm-trees bordered the lone shore, and round about, felt rather than discerned, rose the gigantic peaks and shoulders of encircling hills. Eastwards a dim pallor heralded the climbing moon.

The party hesitated as it were confounded by the immensity and the mystery of the theater in which they stood like insignificant pygmies.

"I say, old man," said Tony, addressing Philip, "we might as well have waited till to-morrow, eh? Except that it's worth coming to see."

"To-morrow we might have been too late," Philip answered. "I'm certain that whatever Pollexfen means to do, he means to do to-night. He is somewhere about with Coco."

"I don't see any signs of them," said Tony. "How are we going to look for them?"

"There is only one way to look for them. That is to make the circuit of the lake. It's not more than three miles, I think."

DOUBLOONS

"Rather like looking for an escape of gas with a lighted candle," Tony remarked reflectively.

"That's as you please," said Philip. "We've got one great advantage over Pollexfen. We're expecting him, but he isn't expecting us. He thinks I'm safe in the 'White Rose.' You have a revolver, and you can shoot straight, can't you? You used to be able to, anyhow. As a matter of fact there won't need to be any shooting. All we have to do is to keep an eye on the doings of our precious friend. That's perfectly peaceful, surely. Now the first thing is to go round the lake."

"Yes. And suppose he finds out we are here, and just enjoys himself by running round in front of us, we may be at it all night, and no nearer in the morning."

"We'll divide into two parties," said Philip quickly; "and go opposite ways, and meet at the other side. Of course, we must keep our lanterns dark."

"And how are we to divide?"

"You and the Captain will go together," Philip ingeniously replied with a decisive air. "Stick to the shore, go as quietly as you can. Is it agreed?"

"Ye-es," from Tony.

"You see," said Philip, "as a lake is water entirely surrounded by land, we're bound to meet again ultimately if we keep going."

"And if nothing happens," Captain Chetwode put in solemnly.

"Exactly," Philip smiled. "Are you ready? Cover the lanterns. It's not so dark as all that. What you have to do is to walk slowly and carefully."

DOUBLOONS

"Well," said Tony. "Good luck! It's a gamble. I hope we shall win. Miss Pollexfen, are you quite sure —"

"Quite," she interrupted him, and added more softly: "Thank you very much."

"In about half an hour or so, then," said Philip. "We'll run into each other on the opposite coast. Remember where the moon is rising. When you've got that point exactly on your right you'll know you have done your share of the distance. And, look here, don't get excited and shoot *us* when you meet us. We shouldn't like it at all — should we, Miss Pollexfen?"

She murmured a faint appreciation of his witticisms. Then the two couples turned their backs on each other. Philip and Mary found the walking comparatively easy. She would not take his arm. He was on her left, between her and the water, into which his foot splashed lightly at intervals. She now wore her cloak. Once she stumbled, and once she drew back with swift foreboding at sight of a long dark object which barred their progress, one end of it disappearing in the water.

"Step over it," said Philip; "it's only a dead tree."

"I thought —" she began, but did not finish the sentence. He helped her over the tree.

"Why did you come?" he demanded suddenly. "I said it was madness, and it is. However, you are not used to being crossed, and so you had your way. But you ought not to have come. I have a habit of speaking my mind to women I admire, and so I speak it to you."

"Ah!" she breathed, looking straight ahead. "I had to come. That was all. I had to come. Women have these

DOUBLOONS

fancies. It was something in me stronger than myself that forced me to come. Something — perhaps I was wrong,” she broke off.

“What puzzles me,” said Philip, after a pause, “is the doings of Master Coco. He must have kept some private information up his sleeve all this time in order to sell it to Mr. Pollexfen at the end. And the information must have been important, or the good Pollexfen would not have dragged him off as he did in such a hurry. I’m rather sorry Coco has ratted. Especially as he isn’t clever enough to make Mr. Pollexfen keep to any bargain that Mr. Pollexfen may have concluded with him.”

“Do you think that Coco has ratted, then?” Mary questioned.

“Don’t you?”

“I do not. I’ve had too many talks with him to think that. There is only one secret that Coco has kept, and that is the depth of his hatred for the man who killed my father. I realized that bit by bit. He lives simply to nurse that hatred. Probably he overheard something last night that decided him upon a course of action.”

“What?” cried Philip. “Do you mean that Coco has enticed the great Pollexfen up here with the intention of — er — taking some sort of revenge?”

“That is what I mean,” Mary answered.

“Well,” said Philip shortly, “I’m sorry for Coco.”

“I —”

She stopped, clutching Philip’s arm, and pointed over a segment of the lake.

DOUBLOONS

"What can that be?" she whispered excitedly, with outstretched finger.

"I've been watching it for some minutes," said Philip. "At first I thought it was one of these fireflies that had taken root somewhere and made up its mind not to fly any more. But it's a lantern. Sometimes it waves a little."

"I — I'm glad you had noticed it," she stammered. "What are we going to do?"

"Get a little nearer," said Philip.

The anvil music of the ravine blacksmiths continued with monotonous, resonant regularity. The fireflies darted bewilderingly to and fro, weaving their fanciful patterns on the black water. The great fronds of the palm-trees succeeded each other in an endless succession of forms serrated against the profound gloom of the firmament. The pallor in the east had not yet perceptibly increased. The one change in the scene was that steady yellow circle of light which had startled Mary — and which had equally startled Philip, though with masculine disingenuousness he had pretended precisely the contrary. And that light altered everything for them, even to the pace of their heart-beats. That light meant Pollexfen. It meant the treasure, if treasure there was. It meant the solution of the mystery of the Corner House in Strange Street, off Kingsway. It shone steadily, like a demoniac lure.

"It isn't by any chance Sir Anthony and the Captain?" Mary suggested.

"Not unless they have walked two miles or more in the dark in about a quarter of an hour," said Philip. "No! By the way, you will kindly remain behind, and not move, Miss

DOUBLOONS

Pollexfen, when I give the word. I shall approach that lantern alone."

"As you wish," she answered.

A moment later they distinctly heard footsteps within the belt of trees that bordered the shore, and they halted.

"Who's there?" Philip cried in a loud voice.

A shadow seemed to move in the trees, scarcely ten feet from them. Philip's heart knocked at his breast like a hammer. He wondered what Mary must be feeling.

"Who's there?" he repeated.

And then he was astonished to see Mary break away from him with a movement of surprising swiftness. She pulled off her large cloak as she leapt, and with a sweeping gesture, as Philip could dimly discern, she flung it over the shadow amid the trees. There was the report of a revolver, and some cursing within the folds of the cloak. Ere Philip could quite reach it the cloak shifted quickly away, further within the belt of trees. He clutched frantically after it, and caught it by the corner and held it. But he held nothing save the cloak. Footsteps died away in the deep shade of the palms. And was all still again, except for the eternal ringing of the frogs.

"I saw the glint of a revolver," said Mary breathlessly. "I saw it quite plainly, and it was pointed at you. And so I thought of my cloak."

"It was an inspiration!" said Philip. "An inspiration! You've saved my life — do you know?"

"I came to do that," she replied simply. "Something had told me that I should."

"A woman's cloak!" he murmured. "What an idea! Some

DOUBLOONS

day I shall try to thank you," he added. "I can't now. But you're wonderful! Take the cloak, please; you will be chilly."

As, in a manner almost laughably matter-of-fact, he helped her to resume the cloak, they discovered, entangled in the pleats of the cloak, a heavy object. It was a revolver.

"It is Pollexfen's," said Philip quietly, when he had examined it by the light of his lantern. "In that quarter, now we haven't so much to fear."

With frequent glances behind them they proceeded cautiously as far as the light, which still shone unmoved amid the ceaseless play of fireflies. And the light proved to be an ordinary ship's lantern set on a stick upright in the loose soil. Whether Pollexfen, having observed the lanterns of the party from the "Wanderer" immediately on their arrival, had placed it there for the purpose of distracting attention from the real scene of his operations, or whether it did indeed mark the real scene of his operations, which he had left in order to reconnoiter, Philip could not then decide. But either hypothesis demanded the utmost wariness.

"We had better wait here for the others to come. We have, at any rate, found something, and between us we have done something."

They waited, silent. The moon in blanched majesty stepped forth from her couch behind the Eastern hills, and threw the magic of her first beams into the great cup. And even as she appeared, they heard in the distance, above the noise of the frogs, a faint sound of a shot. And Mary took Philip's arm and held it. In vain they tried to see into the belt of trees. They knew not what might be happening within a quarter of

DOUBLOONS

a mile of them. Of one thing only could they be sure: namely, that since the shot had come from the left and not from the right, their friends could have had no concern in it.

Another nerve-shaking pause ensued, and then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, there was a sound in the trees close to them. Mary, who was reclining, sprang up, and the moonrays fell with a pale glitter on her white cloak.

"De Obi!" yelled a despairing voice, cleaving the very heavens.

And the terror-struck visage of Coco appeared for a second and was gone. Coco had seen in Mary the fatal goddess of negro mythology, she who controls the rain, and guards the pool, and foretells death. He fled shrieking, moaning, with wild gesticulations, and so passed along the shore into the shade of the mighty palms. And then there was a heavy splash, and then nothing but the metallic music of the frogs and the darting of the gorgeous fireflies under the full moon. . . .

When Tony and Captain Chetwode arrived, Philip was bending over Mary's form, and moistening her forehead with water from the lake.

"She has fainted," he said briefly. "She will come to directly."

"Not hurt?" Tony demanded.

"No," said Philip. "I'll tell you what's happened in a minute. We've nothing to fear."

Captain Chetwode knelt down by the woman's side. Tears were in his eyes. She had come into his life like a breath of romance. He knew not the name of love, but nevertheless the tears in his eyes were real tears.

DOUBLOONS

At daybreak the watchers, two of whom had twice made the circuit of the lake and found nothing fresh, were again at the lantern. Both Pollexfen and Coco had vanished utterly. Mary was perfectly recovered. From a heroine of the stage she had developed into a less specious and artificial heroine. The blind and waveless face of the lake reflected the movements of earliest light, while the splendor of the moon waned and died. The watchers could now for the first time savor the primeval peace that wraps the lovely hollow. The Grand Etang lay before their eyes in the heart of the verdure-clad hills, curtained on all sides by branching boughs embroidered with orange and scarlet and purple flowers. But nothing lived save the trees. Though it was morn, not a bird flashed plumage nor uttered cry; not a lizard rustled in the shade.

Thanks to the prudent sagacity of Oxwich, the party were able to eat and drink.

"By jove! I say! What's that?" cried Tony, after he had shied a dead palm branch into the water. With the natural elasticity of his temperament, he had recovered sooner than the others from the effect of the events of the night and the possible fatal corollaries of those events.

He pointed to a minute black point sticking up out of the water, about three yards away from them, exactly opposite to where the lantern had been.

"Better go in and see," said Philip.

And Tony, ever ready for the water, waded in.

The minute black point was the corner of a metal box about two feet long by one foot broad and six inches deep. Tony could just lift it, but he could not bring it away, for the

DOUBLOONS

reason that it was attached by means of a ring and copper wire to something else beneath the surface. This something else proved to be another similar box, and the second box was in its turn attached to others. By the aid of a contrivance of the Captain's, the copper wire was cut, and the three men began to carry the heavy boxes ashore. It was a laborious task and a moist. They were soon indeed soaked to the neck.

"But these aren't old coffers," Mary exclaimed; "they're quite new. Look at the keyhole. And there's a name on the back — *Chumler*."

"'Chumler the safe-man!'" grumbled the Captain. "If they're Chumler's, we shall never open them — that's sure." In his mind's eye was a vision of Chumler's famous ship window in Piccadilly with the historic safe therein that Charles Peace himself had failed to get into.

"Hum!" said Philip.

"Is this what you've come for, then?" the Captain asked, shaking one of the boxes in his wiry arms, and listening for the sound.

"Of course it is," said Tony. "Haven't I told you all along?"

"Well," the Captain said, "you'd better take it down to the yacht by way of Goyave. It will be less noticed; I can't do with any suspicions attaching to my yacht."

A couple of hundred yards off a figure appeared out of the belt of palms, and strolled to the margin of the lake; hesitated there a few instants, and disappeared. The whole party saw the man clearly, and were sure that it was neither Walter Pollexfen nor Coco. He had somewhat of a foreign carriage.

XXXIV

WORLD POLITICS

FORTY-EIGHT hours later, on a perfect tropic morning outside the little palm-fringed bay of George Town, the "Wanderer," with Captain Chetwode in a fussy and excited mood, was making ready to leave those shores. Nothing had been seen or heard of Walter Pollexfen and Coco, and the "White Rose" had not reappeared. The only other vessel of size in the neighborhood of George Town was the "Pelagea," the Russian ship which had already anchored there when the "Wanderer" arrived. Now, just as the crowd of harbor boats were pulling away from the yacht's side, and the gangway was being drawn up, Captain Chetwode, who was on the bridge, and conscious of the loss of two nights' sleep, observed that an extremely smart cutter was on its way from the "Pelagea" to the "Wanderer," and that in the stern-sheets of the cutter sat a man in the naval uniform of a Russian captain. He noticed also that the "Pelagea," hitherto passing for a private craft, was flying the blue cross on a white ground, which only ships of the Czar's navy are entitled to fly.

Captain Chetwode delayed giving the commands which were on the tip of his tongue; he gazed blankly at the cutter as it shot over the glittering emerald of the Caribbean. He

DOUBLOONS

had already had more adventure than he bargained for, and the prospect of further complications did nothing to soothe him.

Horace, too, had the cutter under observation, and he it was who demanded of the officer in the stern-sheets as the boat drew alongside:

“Do you want to come up?”

The officer replied that he did.

“I’ll go and tell uncle,” said Horace, running off. And the gangway, half raised, was lowered again. Thus it is, in a manner the reverse of ceremonial, that the most solemn incidents begin. Captain Chetwode was so astonished at the turn of the affair that he did and said nothing until the officer was on board and greeting Sir Anthony Didring and Philip Congleton Masters with the elaborate punctilio of a diplomat who is conscious of a high mission.

The officer tendered a card.

“Le Capitaine Porfiry Platonitch Kirsanov.”

And, speaking English too correctly for an Englishman, he begged the honor of an interview with Sir Anthony in a private place.

In three minutes Sir Anthony, with his own hand, was offering whisky to Captain Kirsanov in the yacht’s smoking-room, while Philip attended to the cigarettes. Tony had indicated that Philip’s presence would be essential. Both these young men tried to look as if visits from Russian captains were everyday episodes in their careers. It is possible that they succeeded moderately well, but in reality they were somewhat startled, if not frightened. They recognized the

DOUBLOONS

Russian captain, and in some strange way the sight of him stimulated a certain activity in their consciences. He was the man they had seen at the Grand Etang on the morning after the discovery of the boxes.

"I hope I may not be delaying your departure," said Kirsanov, thanking Philip with a wonderful smile for a match.

"Not at all; not at all," Tony replied.

"I wished to discuss with you, if you permit, a question of extreme delicacy," Kirsanov proceeded. He looked round to see if all the apertures were closed, and drew his chair a little nearer to the chairs of the Englishmen.

"Indeed!" said Philip.

"The question of your cargo," said Kirsanov. "Pardon my indiscretion."

"Our cargo?" Tony exclaimed, as if to convey that he knew nothing of any cargo.

"Your cargo," said Kirsanov. "You have on board — again I pray you to pardon my indiscretion — two hundred and thirty-seven steel coffers. Is it not so?"

"Well," Tony murmured, blushing. "As a matter of fact, we have."

"You have had them brought down by night from the Grand Etang, where you found them submerged — it is two evenings ago. Without doubt you performed the transport during the night for private reasons, into which it would be clumsy on my part to inquire."

He smiled.

"You do not know the history of those coffers," he resumed.

DOUBLOONS

"You do not know precisely what they contain, nor how they came to be where you found them, nor to whom they belong. If you will accord me the permission, I am here to tell you these things."

"Please do," said Sir Anthony.

"We should like to know very much," said Philip, and Philip also was blushing.

Captain Kirsanov blew a long lance of smoke before proceeding.

"On the 27th of May," said he, speaking more slowly, "I was on the Russian man-of-war the 'Oslabia.' It was five minutes to three in the afternoon. The water was rushing in through a hole in her side. Her two forward compartments were wrecked. She began to heel. She heeled more and more. Have I mentioned that we were in the Straits of Tsushima, and that the greatest naval battle in the history of civilization was in progress? Such was the case. I received reports that first one magazine and then another was flooded. At last we were obliged to shut down the magazines on the port side, and to use only the starboard magazines. Then water poured on board in immense volumes. I entered a battery, and I saw that the end was come. I gave orders on my own authority to stop the ammunition hoists and dynamos. Then I ordered the crew to abandon ship, and I went to the Captain. At this moment the left side of the bridge touched the water, and the deck rose vertically. The Captain was clinging to a rail. 'It is a pity,' I said to him, 'that nearly half a million Imperials should go down with her.' For, unknown to anyone except Admiral Rojdestvensky, the Captain,

DOUBLOONS

myself, and some minor officials of the pay department, the 'Oslabia' carried — if I may say so — the financial resources of the Baltic Fleet. The money was naturally supposed to be elsewhere. The Captain surprised me by replying: 'You are mistaken, Porfiry; I had every coffer transported to the "Anadyr" three hours ago.' He was then swept away by a wave — the sea was very rough and weather very foggy — and drowned. I remembered nothing else till I awakened on board the Japanese cruiser, the 'Kasuga,' the next day."

He sipped at the whisky.

"Now, as you may possibly recollect, the 'Anadyr' disappeared utterly for rather more than one month, when she suddenly arrived at Madagascar. Everybody was thinking that she had been sunk. She was an auxiliary cruiser. Out of six of her class she alone escaped. The 'Kostroma' was captured, and the 'Irtish,' the 'Kamschatka,' the 'Russ,' and the 'Ural' were destroyed. Ah, gentlemen! . . . If order had reigned in our unhappy fleet, the coffers would from the first have been on the 'Ural.'

"What occurred to the 'Anadyr' during the time of her absence? Few people knew, and those who know will not tell all they know. Her captain died — or he was killed. There was a mutiny, one of several secret mutinies that broke out after the Battle of the Japan Sea. The 'Anadyr' encountered one of the pleasure yachts hired by the Imperial Government, under the French flag, to watch the movements of the Japanese fleets. You will call to mind the law case concerning these yachts last month. The coffers were transported to the yacht, under the orders of some of the secret revolutionaries who were

DOUBLOONS

to be found in both crews. It had been decided that the contents of the coffers were to be used for the revolutionary cause. But it was necessary to conceal them for a period. The thieves knew that, owing to the lamentable defects of our bureaucracy, they had only to wait in order to be forgotten. On board the yacht was a Scotchman, who suggested the Grand Etang as a hiding-place, and received a splendid reward for superintending the affair. No Russian, I regret to say it, could be trusted."

Philip was about to make a remark, but the Captain entreated him with a fine gesture to be patient.

And he resumed:

"Among the depositaries of the secret was a young doctor named Isaac Pavlovsky, who soon afterwards had the misfortune to find himself in Odessa during the riots. To save himself from the police, he assumed the uniform of a gendarme, and this was his ruin, for he was caught by a mob of laborers, who quite naturally refused to believe that he was not really a gendarme, and he was stoned to death. This was on the quays. He fell, dying, into a dinghy, and the dinghy belonged to the steamship 'Volga,' the name of whose captain was Pollexfen. But he survived twelve hours, and confided to Captain Pollexfen various secrets of the revolutionary cause."

"Well, I'm —!" Tony exclaimed.

"Yes?" said Captain Kirsanov, politely. "I have to add that some of this information soon reached the Ministry of Marine at St. Petersburg. Three-quarters of a million English pounds sterling were not to be scorned even by a Govern-

DOUBLOONS

ment which can still borrow at five and a half per cent, gentlemen. I was given private instructions to make an inquiry. A yacht was put at my disposal. The inquiry has been completed. In the course of it I naturally learned about the death of Captain Pollexfen. After that, I came here to — to wait and see. Among the points as to which I lacked information was the exact location of the boxes in the lake. I found out nearly everything but that extremely important detail. It would astonish you, perhaps, to know how much I have discovered as to the relations between yourselves and the yacht 'White Rose,' and even as to the original stupidity, if I may so express myself, which caused Captain Pollexfen to disclose his secret to his brother Walter."

"Excuse me," said Philip. "Do I gather that, according to you, Captain Pollexfen knew to whom these boxes belonged? Because, if so, the inference is that he meant to steal them."

"Not so," Kirsanov replied smoothly. "He had no intention to steal. There was a split in the ranks of the revolutionaries — as usual" — Kirsanov smiled slightly — "and Captain Pollexfen's English sympathies, which were naturally against the Russian Government, had been engaged by Pavlovsky on behalf of one of the two revolutionary parties. He was to forestall the other party, take the coffers to a certain Adriatic port, and receive ten per cent for his pains."

"Not a bad reward!" said Tony.

"The same reward is now offered by the Russian Government, whom I have the honor to represent. I have placed the facts of the case before you. You are, I assume, gentlemen adventurers. I am sure that you are not robbers, and I do not

DOUBLOONS

suppose that any political sympathies you may have will impair your sense of justice."

"Then," said Tony, "you are asking us to give you the boxes? That's about what it comes to."

"I am asking you to restore the coffers to their owner, his Imperial Majesty the Czar. And for your trouble and your risks I am authorized to pay the sum of seventy-five thousand pounds sterling."

There was a pause. The young men exchanged glances.

"It seems to us strange," said Philip at length, "that a demand has not long ago been made formally through your Ambassador in London."

"Ah! My dear sir," returned Kirsanov, "if it has not, the reason is simple." He sighed. "The reputation of some of the highest personages in Russia is involved in the affair. Do not press me. Let me say only that a formal diplomatic explanation of all the facts would necessitate the downfall of at least one man who would prefer civil war in Russia to his own disgrace. I can produce my credentials, signed by Vice-Admiral Birileff, and I shall have the honor of doing so when I have received your reply. May I respectfully ask for your reply within two hours? If it should be in accordance with my expectations, I shall have the privilege of showing to you something which will interest you."

"What is that?"

"The keys of the coffers," said Captain Kirsanov. "With the carelessness characteristic of our race, the man who transferred the coffers to the yacht left the keys on the 'Anadyr.' I have them. The Ministry of Marine buys its coffers in

DOUBLOONS

London, and I assume, therefore, that you have not yet succeeded in opening them."

With a gentle Slav smile Captain Kirsanov rose.

"Gentlemen," he flourished.

Tony whispered to Philip.

"My friend says," Philip announced, "that, subject to proper verification and so forth, the answer to your proposal will be in the affirmative. I agree with him."

"Oh, yes," Tony broke in impulsively, "we don't want two hours to decide that we aren't a pair of thieves. But no bunkum, you know!" The Russian did not apparently comprehend the phrase.

And when Captain Kirsanov had gone:

"Well, I'm —!" Tony asserted again.

"It is just a shade out of the ordinary, isn't it?" Philip concurred.

XXXV

WHAT PHILIP WAS TO GAIN

IN the meantime the traffic up and down Kingsway had increased; Londoners were learning to use it, as Philip and Mary discovered on a bright afternoon, when by one of those sheer accidents that will occur even to the most serious young men, he happened to overtake her in the street. They had been in England somewhat less than a month.

The principal item of news which had greeted them on the arrival of the yacht in the Solent was that the bodies of Walter Pollexfen and the negro, Coco, had floated to the surface of the Grand Etang and been discovered — but far from each other. Pollexfen had a bullet in the nape of his neck, and it was not of drowning that he had died. But there were no external marks of injury on Coco, and the doctors said that he had been drowned. The supposition was that Coco, having inspired the arch-plotter with confidence, had deliberately shot him from behind. It was in the essential irony of things that Pollexfen, after deceiving the cleverest men on two continents for nearly half a century, should at the end have been deceived by so simple a being as Coco — a poor creature in whose head there was room only for one idea at a time. The finding of the corpses rejuvenated London's

DOUBLOONS

interest in a series of crimes destined to become classical; it made Horace a hero at his new school; it gave a passing thrill to Horace's mother; and it caused an enormous amount of inconvenience to Mary Pollexfen, Philip, and Sir Anthony. The police, now that there was nothing to do, imparted into the affair an energy which was astounding. The three friends were examined and cross-examined, watched, observed, shadowed, and spied on, to such a point that their nervous systems would have been justified in breaking down under the strain. Then suddenly the activity ceased; the C.I.D. devised other distractions for itself; the Pollexfen affair took the rank of ancient history.

The tangible remains of it appeared in some seventy-five thousand pounds sterling, which had been paid over to Sir Anthony and Philip by the emissary of the Bear at Fort de France in the presence of the French governor of Martinique. The money was a rich source of discussion during the voyage home. Tony would not take any of it; he was too wealthy for such trifles, which he pretended were nothing to him; and perhaps his vanity was to be excused. Philip argued that in right it belonged to Mary, as the descendant of her father.

Mary argued that the winning of it was due wholly to Philip's enterprise. Neither was really averse from the arrangement by which it was ultimately divided equally between them, for, after all, even the highest-minded persons do not refuse to accept thirty-seven thousand pounds out of sheer sentimentality.

Now, as Philip and Mary were walking down Kingsway

DOUBLOONS

that afternoon a newsboy, and then another newsboy, ran up Kingsway screeching and howling the late edition of the *Evening Record*, and waving contents-bills which bore the curt legend "Walter Pollexfen's Diary. Special." Philip bought the yellow sheet, and tried to open it in the breeze. This occurred precisely opposite to the new teashop which the greatest of afternoon tea companies had then recently opened half-way between Strange Street and Aldwych. They accepted the shelter of the teashop, which was nearly empty, being peopled only by elaborately-muslined young women in reposeful attitudes. They found a corner, and on a marble-topped table Philip spread out the newspaper.

The *Record* had been spending money in the West Indies; in fact, it had engaged a "special" out there from the staff of a Jamaica paper. And here was its reward, in the shape of extracts from a diary which had been discovered in the pocket of Walter Pollexfen's coat. The special had cabled extracts from the diary, and the *Record* thus added another to the long catalogue of the *Record's* "scoops."

Philip glanced down the double-leaded lines, printed in devinne type across two columns of the page.

"Really!" he murmured.

One of the muslined ladies dropped some earthenware heavily on to the table, and there floated on to the newspaper a little square ticket with the words:

2 teas.....		6d.
2 sult.....		4d.
		—
		10d.

DOUBLOONS

"Really!" Philip repeated impatiently brushing aside the paper. "You must read this yourself. Miss Pollexfen," and he twisted the paper round for Mary to peruse. She read:

"This Masters is simple, but he is not a fool — two different things. I am a fool. I ought to have killed him. Like all great men, I am capable of sublime follies."

* * * * *

"In future years, when the study of what is called crime has been placed on a scientific basis, my conduct of this superb affair from the moment when I realized that my beloved brother was dead will be regarded as decidedly in advance of its time. I have lived too soon. The manner in which I have mingled fiction with fact in my accounts of the matter to various persons, not to mention my superb creation of the log of the *El Legato*, is worthy of a greater age. It is wasted on the twentieth century. In the twentieth century it is indeed dangerous."

* * * * *

"I nearly dropped Masters overboard last night. Why did I not do so? He's infectious. He's making me old-fashioned. My sole reason for not dropping him overboard was that I had promised him his life! What a reason! Ye gods! What a reason!"

* * * * *

"I'll go to South America after this, and get myself appointed president of some republic. Brazil seems indicated. As dictator of Brazil I could make history on a wholesale scale."

DOUBLOONS

"I lost my head for a second when I saw the bold baronet and that girl close to me on the balcony. Such a thing has never happened to me before. I guessed at once that the woman asleep in the restaurant belonged to the party. An agreeable piece of goods, I should imagine. She has charm. Twenty years since I was in love! Always with plump women."

* * * * *

"Foolish trip to the 'Wanderer' to-night; but it amused me. I see I shall have to dispose of Masters, after all. The curious thing is that it will cost me a pang."

* * * * *

"Niggers are the same everywhere. Incapable of a fixed purpose — like kids. Why do they breed so rapidly?"

* * * * *

"Masters' boyish anger when I told him about the propeller was most interesting, psychologically. Now I should have said —"

Here the diary broke off.

The *Record* promised its readers the unabridged journal in a fortnight's time.

Mary folded up the paper, and gazed at Philip in silence.

"What horrible dangers you ran!" she said.

"But look at the reward!" replied he.

"Ah!" she breathed. "Money! Is it worth —?"

His glance rested with quick sympathy on her mourning dress, and then roved round the room to make sure that no one was within hearing. "Dear friend," he whispered, in a

DOUBLOONS

voice suddenly passionate, "forgive me! Some time, in a year perhaps, I might ask for something else. I—" He violently blushed, and added abruptly: "Shall we go?"

Her smile enveloped him like a caress, and there was a subtle acquiescence in her attitude as she hovered near him while he paid the bill at the desk.

Lower down, at the stage-door of the Metropolitan, a man and a woman were getting into a motor-car. They were so absorbed in each other that they did not notice the other couple on the pavement.

"Josephine tells me she shall leave the stage when she marries Tony," said Mary.

"And when do *you* mean to return to it?" Philip asked anxiously.

"Never!"

THE END

